

Classical Mythology



Prof. Keren Freidenreich
Fall 2024

The Nature of Myth

- What is a myth?
 - Myth: from Gr. *mythos*, ‘a word; a speech’, also: ‘the thing; matter’, ‘rumor’, ‘proverb’
 - A traditional story with collective, communal importance
- Elements of a myth:
 - Plot: narrative structure consisting of a beginning, a middle, and an end
 - Character: from Gr., meaning “certain mental imprint”; can be god, human, or animal
 - Setting: time and place in which events unfold, always in the distant past or outside of time
- Myth is a traditional story
 - One which has been “handed over” (Lt. *trado*) orally from one generation to the next, verbally
- What is “collective importance”?
 - Myths that hold meaning for the group, beyond the individual, and describe patterns of behavior to function as models for members of society
- Anonymity of author:
 - Defines *mythos* vs *logos* (an account written by a known author)

Types of Myth

1. Divine myths

- a. Stories in which supernatural beings are the main character
- b. Explain why the world, or some aspect, is the way it is

2. Legends

- a. Stories of the great deeds of human heroes or heroines
- b. Narrate the events of the human past, and may serve as moral examples to emulate

3. Folktales

- a. Stories whose actors are ordinary humans or animals
- b. Entertain the audience and teach or justify customary patterns of behavior

Characters of Divine Myths

- Supernatural beings who are superior to humans in power and splendor
- Control powerful forces of nature (e.g. lightning, thunder, fire) or are elemental personifications (e.g. Sky, Earth, Ocean)
- Conflicts are cosmic in scope
- May be personified abstract concepts (e.g. Victory (Nike) or Luck (Tyche))
- May have fully developed personalities or traits (e.g. Zeus controls the sky, is a father, husband; has a defined personality; divine judge)

Settings of Divine Myths

- Usually take place in a world before or outside ours, where time and space have different meanings
- Events are set beyond the reach of history
- Often in places inaccessible to humans if real (e.g. peak of Mount Olympus)

Functions of Divine Myth

- Traditional stories
 - Shared cultural stories passed down orally from one generation to the next; binds the community together with a sense of a 'shared past and culture'
- Religious
 - Inspired and/or justified by myth
 - Religion: a set of beliefs that motivates a course of action (e.g. if Zeus controls the weather, then sacrifices to Zeus may persuade him to bring rain during a drought)
 - Religion often uses the same stories as myth, but is functionally distinct
 - Crucial difference: one can tell a myth without engaging in religion
- Etiology
 - From Gr., *aitia/aition*, 'cause'
 - Explanations for why the world is the way that it is
 - E.g. Typhoeus under Mount Etna, a volcano; the abduction of Persephone and the passing of the seasons
 - Therefore, myths are early attempts at scientific explanations

Legends

- Early attempts at historical explanations
- In legends, humans were central characters, even if supported by the gods
- Legends feature heroes or heroines of exceptional strength, virtue, beauty
- Legendary stories belong to our world and time, albeit the distant past
- Believed to have been entirely real; people will later claim descent from heroes
- Rooted in some historicity: the name Menelaus ('upholder of the people') appears in Linear B tablets, as does Agamemnon
- Also served an etiological function (e.g. king Aegeus, a mortal, jumped to his death from a cliff to the sea, which we now call the Aegean Sea)

Folktale

- Any traditional story that is not a divine myth or legend
- Literally a “folk tale” i.e. a tale about and by the folk: regular people
- Features regular, non supernatural humans or talking animals (e.g. Aesop’s fables)
- Do not serve religious or etiological function
- Intended to entertain or reinforce social values
- Folktale types: character or story tropes that are shared in folktales globally (e.g. the “Cinderella type”; the trickster)
- Folktale motifs: constituent pieces of folktales (e.g. “abused younger sister”, “spirit helper”, “marriage to the prince”)

A Greek Example

- Folktale type: “The Quest”
- Folktale motifs: “powerful antagonist”, “divine assistance”, “clever hero trickster”, “marriage to a princess”
- Perseus is sent on a mission to slay the Gorgon, with the assistance of Athena; on his way back, he kills a sea monster and rescues a princess, Andromeda, whom he marries

Myth, legend, and folktale blur but the distinctions are useful!

The Study of Myth

- Myths: classified as divine myths, legends, and folktales
- Mythology: lit., the study of myths
- Classical mythology: the study of Greek and Roman myths
- Scholarly approaches to the study of myth:
 - The recording and compiling of a given culture's myths
 - The analysis of the role that specific myths play or played within the culture
 - The study of how one culture's myths are related to those of another
 - Assessment of the lasting human significance of specific myths or groups of myths

Scholarly approaches to the study of myth: The Recording and Compiling of a Given Culture's Myths

- Classical myths mainly survive in written format; kinds of material evidence can inform and support the modern study of myth, too
- Transmission bias from oral to written language (e.g. who wrote it down? What was their intention for writing it? Were they male or female? When did they write it?)
- Various authors used various sources for myths, often conflicting

Scholarly approaches to the study of myth: Analysis of the Role of Myths in a Culture

- Social function informs classical mythology

Therefore, scholars might ask:

- What might the myths have meant to the Greeks and Romans?
- What did an individual myth say about their cultural values, e.g. did it reinforce or challenge previously accepted beliefs?
- Why were individual myths interesting enough to be passed down?

Scholarly approaches to the study of myth: The Study of Comparative Mythology

- Tracing relationships of similar myths between different cultures (Gilgamesh/Samson/Heracles)
- How do communication and trade inform myth transmission?
- How were myths changed to suit the receiving culture's social needs?
- What does this teach us about both cultures involved in the transmission?

Scholarly approaches to the study of myth: Lasting Significance of Specific Myths or Groups of Myths

- Why do we still read (and tell) myths over 2,500 years old?
- What can this tell us about their deeper human significance?
- Is there a philosophical or psychological truth behind the surface meaning?
- At risk of being more telling of the scholar's bias than a universal truth
- Anachronism/Anachronistic thinking
 - OED: "The relating of an event, custom, or circumstance to a wrong period of time."

Cultural Context of Classical Myth

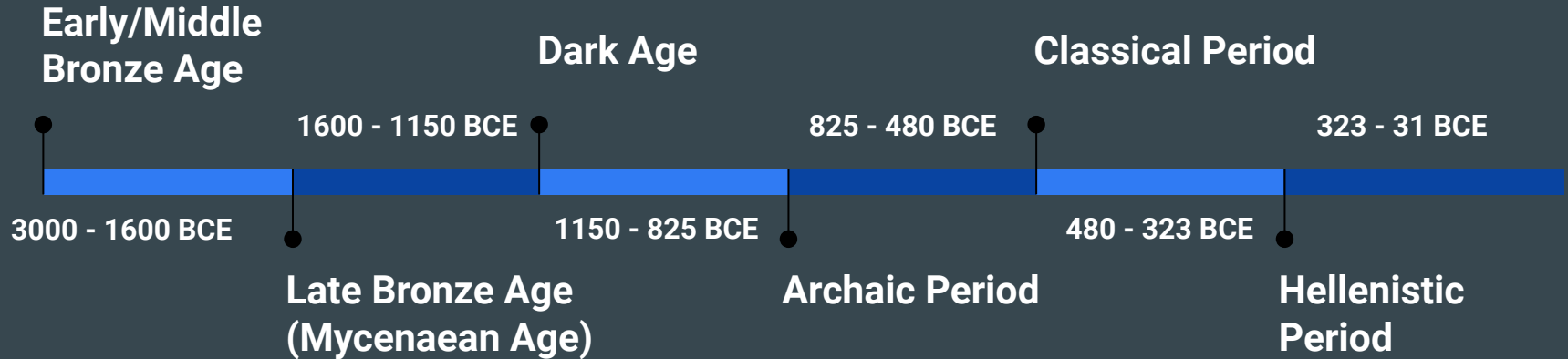
- Geography
 - How does the land in which the Greeks lived influence their myths?
- History
 - How does the historical development of the Greeks influence their myths?
- Society
 - How does Greek society influence their myths?



Geography

- Barren, dry, hilly
- Large mountain ranges with isolated fertile plains
- Cultivated wheat, barley, olives, and wine
- Tended goat, sheep, pigs, rarely cattle or horses
- Seafaring culture developed to catch fish, travel between islands
- Generally speaking, the paucity of cultivable land and natural resources led the Greeks to trade with other national

Greek History: Periodization



Greek History in the Stone Age

- Greece was occupied even in the Paleolithic age (Old Stone Age), before 7000 BCE
- Almost nothing is known about these early inhabitants
- From the Neolithic (New Stone) Age (6000-3000 BCE) survives foundation stones of houses, pottery, stone tools, and graves
- The people lived in small communities and practiced agriculture

Early/Middle Bronze Age (3000-1600 BCE)

- Unknown indigenous people lived in Mainland Greece; we know nothing of their race or language
- Minoans ruled on Crete, built elaborate palaces, centered at Cnossos
- Possessed complete control over the sea (yet no fortifications)
- Circa 2100 BCE: Indo-Europeans migrated to Greece; domestic horses appear
- Their culture – only known through comparative linguistics (PIE)
- They lived in a social hierarchal community with kings, warriors, and food producers



Reconstructed fresco from Minoan palace
on Cnossos, Greece

Late Bronze Age (Mycenaean Age) (1600-1150 BCE)

- Ruled by powerful kings who collected immense wealth; they lived in massive, fortified strong-holds
- Used Linear B writing across Greece and Crete, primarily for record-keeping
- Late Bronze Age Collapse caused widespread destruction



The Mycenaean Lion Gate
Mycenae, Greece

THE GREEK DARK AGE

(1150-800 BCE)

- Use of Linear B lost
- Dorian invasion dominated Peloponnesos
- Refugees fleeing Dorians moved to the central islands and Asia Minor, a region called Ionia
- Other refugees fled to northern Asia Minor, a region called Aeolis
- Spoke Dorian, Ionian, and Aeolian dialects of Greek, respectively

The Course of an Empire: Destruction
Thomas Cole, 1833
New York Historical Society



ARCHAIC PERIOD

(800-480 BCE)

- (Re)Invention of writing around 825
- Greek alphabet used vowels, developed from Phoenician alphabet
- Colonization of western lands began, e.g. Sicily
- Development of *polis*, a politically independent city-state
- Development of coinage gave rise to merchant class
- Called Age of Tyrants because of rule by tyrants, i.e. *tyrannos*, strongmen who took power by violent means
- In 508 BCE, Cleisthenes took first steps towards the founding of democracy in Athens
- Poleis, however, were still rule by citizens, i.e. adult male citizens, thus excluding women, minors, enslaved ppl, foreign residents (in numbers, Athenian males were about 25,000/~200,000)



The Kleobis and Biton *kouroi*
6th cen. BCE
Delphi Archaeological Museum

THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

480-323 BCE

Greek defeated the Persian Invasions in 490 and 480 BCE – victory marks the beginning of the Classical period: the victory “proved how noble a thing is freedom (Hdt. 5.78)

Defined a common notion of “Greek” as opposed to “non-Greek”

Genre of history invented by Herodotus and Thucydides

- Famous for the flourishing of culture, primarily in Athens- tragedy, comedy, literature, philosophy, poetry
- Dominance of the *polis* structure
- Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) devastated Greek world
- Hippocrates, Plato, Thucydides et al. challenged mythic accounts of the world



The Parthenon at Athens

HELLENISTIC PERIOD

(323-30 BCE)

- 338 BCE: Philip II of Macedon conquered the Greek city-states and dissolved the *polis* structure
- His son, Alexander the Great conquered Persia and attempted to conquer India, dying of fever (or poisoning) in 323 BCE, the start of the Hellenistic Period
- Cultural capital shifted from Athens to Alexandria, in Egypt
- Lasted until 31 BCE when Cleopatra was defeated by Octavian at the Battle of Actium

Laocoön and his sons
Hellenistic statue group, 27 BCE-70 CE
Vatican Museums, Vatican City



Greek Society – fundamentals of

- Consisted of:
 - Males
 - Females
 - Enslaved people

- Informed by:
 - Political institutions
 - Shared historical traditions
 - Religion: Beliefs & customs



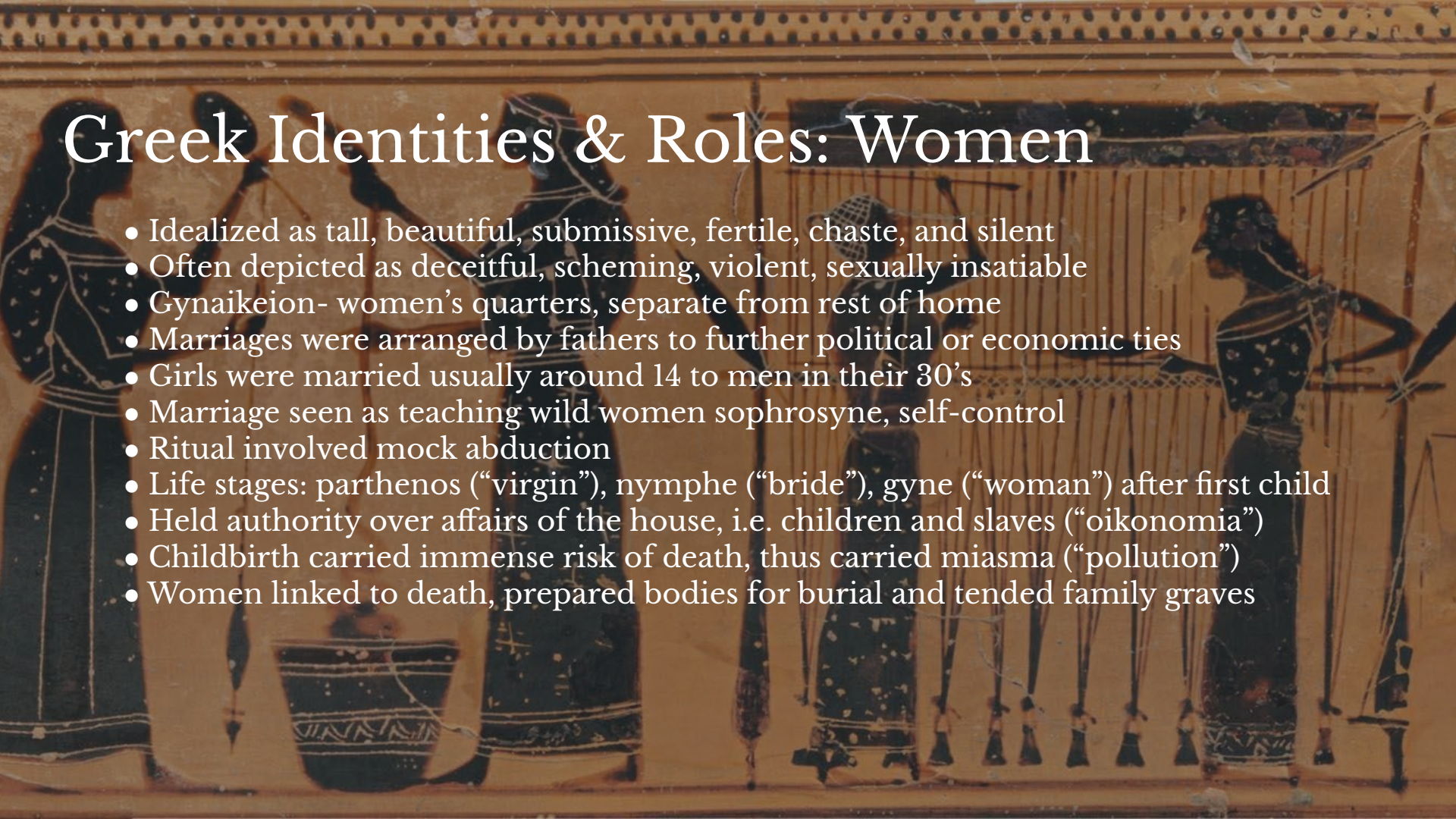


Greek Identities & Roles: Men

- Sole citizens of polis
- Held final authority over wives and households
- Symposium- socio-political drinking party hosted by wealthy men
- Pedagogue- personal tutor who educated boys 6-13 in literature
- Pederasty- Greek custom in which men began a relationship with adolescent boys, receiving sexual gratification in exchange for mentorship and social education
- Gymnasium- social space for physical education, philosophical discussion, pursuit of pederasty
- Hoplite- Greek infantry soldier, fighting in a phalanx formation- war was a constant facet of Greek life

Greek Identities & Roles: Women

- Idealized as tall, beautiful, submissive, fertile, chaste, and silent
- Often depicted as deceitful, scheming, violent, sexually insatiable
- Gynaikeion- women's quarters, separate from rest of home
- Marriages were arranged by fathers to further political or economic ties
- Girls were married usually around 14 to men in their 30's
- Marriage seen as teaching wild women sophrosyne, self-control
- Ritual involved mock abduction
- Life stages: parthenos ("virgin"), nymphe ("bride"), gyne ("woman") after first child
- Held authority over affairs of the house, i.e. children and slaves ("oikonomia")
- Childbirth carried immense risk of death, thus carried miasma ("pollution")
- Women linked to death, prepared bodies for burial and tended family graves



Greek Identities & Roles: Enslaved People

- Ancient society was utterly dependent upon institution of slavery
- Enslaved ppl were $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ of Athenian workforce
- They provided menial labor, without which Athens would not have developed its culture
- The enslaved were chattel property with no rights
- Could be legally killed or assaulted by enslaver
- Worked in households, farms, factories, or mines
- Could receive salaries and purchase freedom



Religion

- Pantheistic, with no all powerful god- each deity tended to their own sphere
- Depicted with human personalities, capriciousness, no love for humanity
- No sacred written text
- Priests and priestesses performed sacrifices to convince gods to show favor
- “*Do ut des*”- “I give, so that you may give”
- Sacrifices performed on altar outside of temple
- Temple was home of the god’s cult image, not worship of the people or priests
- Seers or oracles could provide cryptic guidance from specific gods
- No moral function or eschatological function

Beliefs and Customs

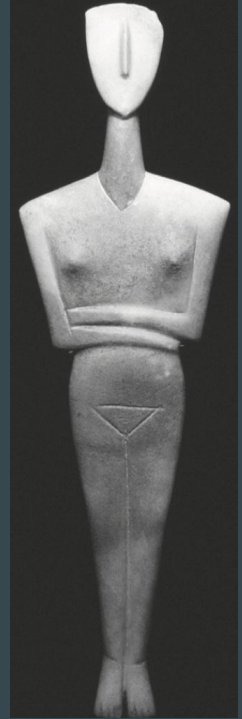
- Magic
 - Private ritual as opposed to public ritual (i.e. public sacrifice)
 - Intention was the same- vying for a god to show favor
 - Often tied to magic or sacred words
- Ghosts
 - Believed world was inhabited by ghosts of those improperly buried
 - *Miasma* (“pollution”) caused by spirit that lived in blood of the dead
 - Murderers were doomed to misfortune, unless spirits swayed by rituals or magic
- Supernatural
 - Thin divide between mortal and divine world
 - Gods regularly intervene in daily life in guise of humans or animals
 - All was connected, so prophecy could be done by nature (birds, leaves), dreams, or trance

The Development of Greek Myths

- Myths were not created in writing; some myths probably existed in prehistory
- Studies through comparative material, archaeological and linguistic examination, as well as theories regarding the transmittal of myths
- Greek culture was largely based off Mesopotamian culture – myths included (similarly, Roman culture was fundamentally Greek)

The Beginning of Greek Myths

- First free-standing statues: fertility figurines
- No known names or clear function
- Found in graves of both women and men; magical powers over life and death?



Left: 'Goddess gives birth', Çatal Hüyük, Turkey, c. 6500-5700 BCE (Head is restored)
Right: 'Mother', Cycladic Islands, Greece, c. 3000 BCE

The Beginning of Greek Myths



Left: 'Goddess gives birth', Çatal Hüyük, Turkey, c. 6500-5700 BCE (Head is restored)

Right: 'Artemis *Potnia Thêrôn*', Greek vase c. 570 BCE (Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, IT)

Greek myths & Indo-European Myths

- Zeus = 'shine', 'the shining', in the Proto-Indo-European language
- IE figures are named 'twin' = Apollo and Artemis ?
- Stories of conflicts between social classes (royalty, warriors, and 'food producers') may have inspired the Trojan War

Transmission of Myths

- In Greek prehistory, myths were transmitted orally, by poets or bards called *aoidoi* – they would perform epics before local aristocracies
- Bards would be taught the art of poetry at a young age, apprenticing at a master and absorbing the epic language
- Epic language – to make memorization easier, the language of epic uses formulaic language: “swift-footed Achilles”, “grey-eyed Athens”, etc – ‘rhythmic phrases’ to carry the bard along the performance
- Despite having no notion of history, bards were aware of their audience’s desire to listen to relatable stories, and so embellished accounts of historical events with wondrous myths (Trojan War was a real event which Homer dramatized with the involvement of the gods)



Attic cup with a bard, c. 515 BCE

Near Eastern Influence on Greek Myths

- Mesopotamian myths were certainly a great source for Greek myths, for instance, the creation of the world with a great battle between ‘old’ and ‘new’ gods
- Sumerians: spoke an unknown language, they lived around modern-day Iran and India. The Sumerians appeared in c. 4000 BCE, with an unprecedentedly advanced culture, raising the first cities in history by 3000 BCE, with as many as forty or fifty thousand inhabitants – there are no known other examples in any other part of the world at the time



The great ziggurat of Ur, dedicated to the moon-goddess Nanna, built c. 2050 BCE. 210 ft long, 150 ft wide, of unknown height; restored during 6th cen. BCE

Near Eastern Influence on Greek Myths

- Each Sumerian city had its own patron god/goddess. The deity lived in its temple
- Prominent Sumerian deities include: An (Sky) – originally the king of the universe, yet his power slowly diminished (Uranus); Inanna – queen of the heavens, goddess of love, desire, and war (Aphrodite & Athena); Enlil, ‘lord of storms’, An’s son, holder of the Tablet of Destiny (Zeus); Enki, ‘Lord of Earth’, god of fertilization, wisdom, magic, a trickster god, sharing qualities with Hermes, but also Prometheus and Poseidon; Ki, ‘mother-goddess’ (Demeter); Ereshkigal, ‘Queen of the great Below’, as an aspect of Ki, corresponds to Persephone

Near Eastern Influence on Greek Myths

- Like the Greek pantheon, Sumerian gods and goddesses were anthropomorphic, too (anthropos + morphē)
- Not just in shape, but in their interactions, behavior, and society: dependence on elders who advise one leading figure, interrelations; they are overcome with desires, enjoy rumors, and are locked in eternal struggles



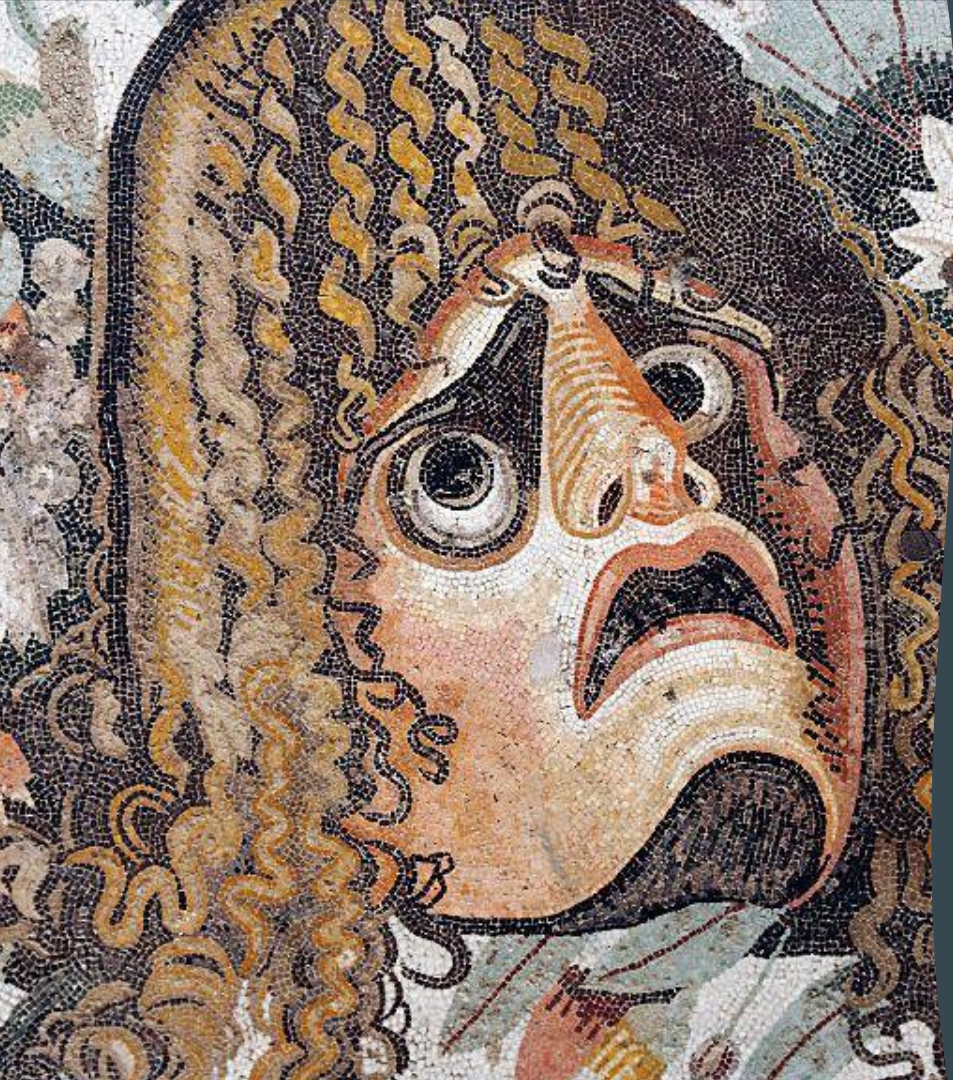
| <i>Sumerian Name</i> | <i>Akkadian/Babylonian Name</i> | <i>Concern</i> | <i>Greek Equivalent</i> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| An | Anu | sky | Zeus |
| Inanna | Ishtar | sexual love, war | Aphrodite, Athena |
| Enki | Ea | sweet water, wisdom, magic | Hermes, Prometheus, Hephaestus, Poseidon |
| Ninhursag, Ki | — | Earth | Gaea, Demeter |
| Ereshkigal | — | death | Persephonê |
| Utu | Shamash | sun | Helios |

Formulation of Greek Myth: Sources

- Greek myths were finally committed to writing during the 6th cen. BCE. The first myths put to writing are included in Homer's epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey
- We don't possess any certain information about Homer's person and life; his epics never refer to writing and so he is assumed to have lived at about the moment when writing was introduced to Greek culture, in the 8th cen. BCE.
- Historically, Homer probably collected traditions from earlier times through the transmission of poetic formulas, but overall he probably described his own time
- And while we do not know the epics' purpose, their influence on Greek culture was most significant

Formulation of Greek Myth: Sources

- Equally important is the poet Hesiod, almost contemporary to Homer (Hesiod: 750-700? BCE), who left us two surviving poems: the Theogony and the Works and Days
- Cyclic Poems/Epic Cycle
- The Homeric Hymns
- Tragedies: Sophocles, Aeschylus, Euripides



The Playwrights

- The three most successful were Aeschylus (c. 525 - c. 456 BCE), Sophocles (c. 496-406 BCE), and Euripides (c. 484-407 BCE).
- Aeschylus was known for his innovation, adding a second actor and more dialogue, and even creating sequels. He described his work as 'morsels from the feast of Homer'
- Sophocles was extremely popular and added a third actor to the performance as well as painted scenery.
- Euripides was celebrated for his clever dialogues, realism, and habit of posing awkward questions to the audience with his thought-provoking treatment of common themes.

Myths of Creation

- Hesiod
 - *Theogony*, composed around 8th century BCE
- Cosmogony vs theogony
 - Cosmogony: origin of the world (cosmos + genos)
 - Theogony: origin of the gods (theos + genos)
 - For Hesiod, they are one and the same
- Hesiodic account of myth
 - No external creator deity
 - Gods and world come to existence in successive stages

Myths of Creation

- Hesiod, *Theogony* 116-125

Chaos was first to appear, then Geae, Earth, the broad-bosomed, unshakable base of things, then Tartarus, windswept and dark ... And Eros arose, fairest of all the immortals, who frees us all from our sorrows, but ruins our hearts' good sense, breaking the wisest intention of gods and mortals alike. From Chaos came Erebus, darkness, and Nyx, night, mother of Aether, radiance, and Hemera, day; these Nyx conceived by uniting with Erebus, gloomy and somber

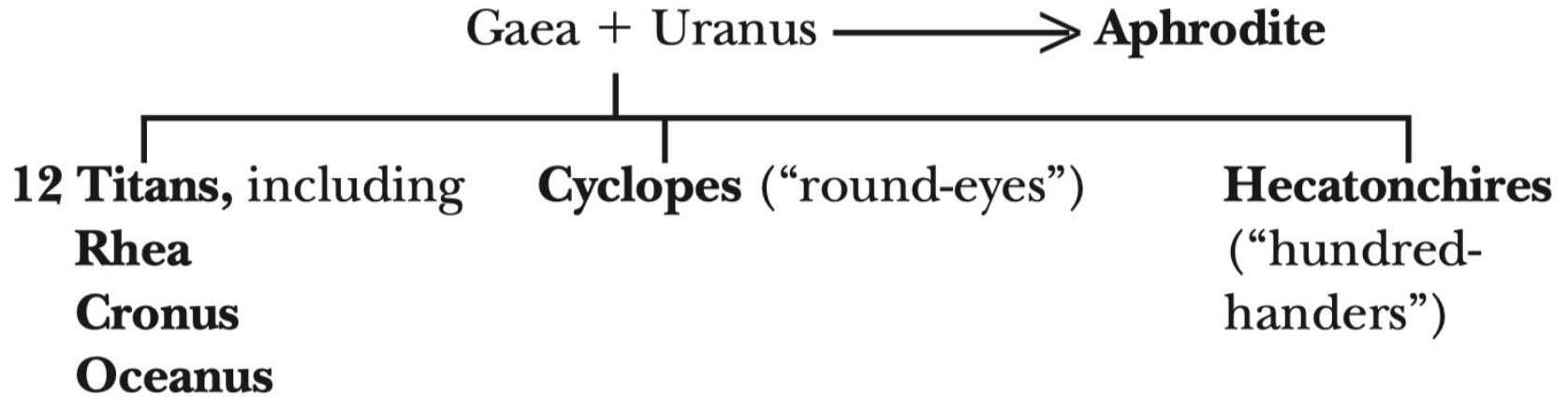
Myths of Creation

- Chaos:
 - Primordial entity outside of time and space
 - All other primordial entities emerge from Chaos ('chasm')
- Gaia:
 - Also Gaea, Gē, Mother Earth
 - Personification of the earth
- Tartarus:
 - Personification of cavernous underworld; the name is of unknown meaning
- Eros:
 - Personification of sexual attraction
- The Children of Chaos: Erebus and Nyx
 - "Darkness" and "Night", respectively

Children of Gaia

- Uranus (Gr. Ouranos)
 - Born of Gaia asexually
 - Personification of Sky above
 - Equal to Gaia
- Titans
 - Six male and six female
 - Oceanus, Coeus, Crius, Hyperion, Iapetus, Theia, Rhea, Themis, Mnemosyne, Phoebe, Tethys
 - Cronus
- Cyclopes
 - Three one-eyed sons, worked forges for the gods
 - Compare with the shepherd cyclopes of Homer, sons of Poseidon
- Hecatoncheires
 - (Lit.) Three hundred-armed, fifty-headed sons

Children of Gaia



The Offspring of Gaea and Uranus.



Depictions of Earth and Sky; Egyptian Papyrus of Tameniu, c. 1000 BCE

Unlike all other ancient civilizations, the Egyptians “did everything backwards” per Herodotus, and represented Sky (Nut/noot) as female and Earth (Geb) as male

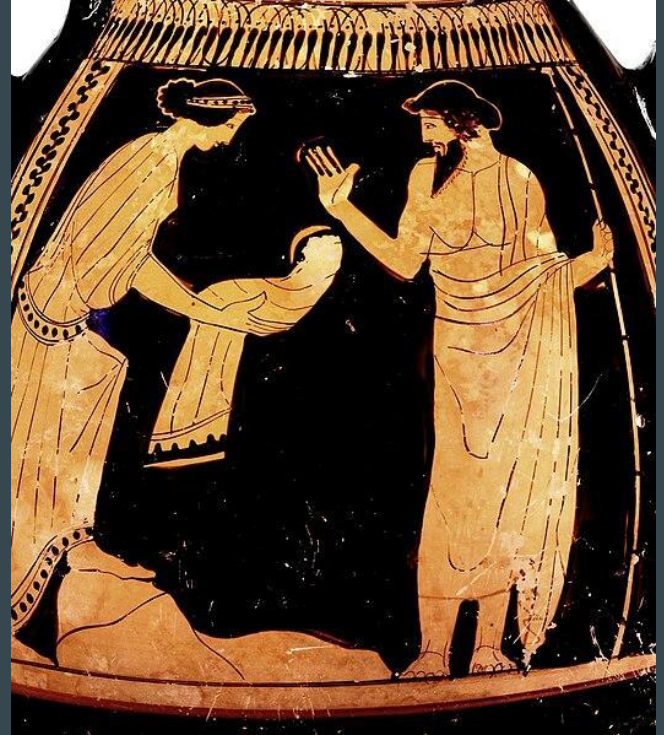
Children of Gaia and Uranus

- Oceanus
 - The river that encircles the world
 - Wells, springs, rivers, fountains, etc. – are all fed by Oceanus
- Tethys
 - The female counterpart to Oceanus, she also lives in the sea
- Offspring
 - Homer: Oceanus and Tethys gave birth to all the gods
 - Hesiod: the pair give birth to the six thousand Oceanids: spirits connected to water sources

Children of Gaia and Uranus

- Cronus (time) and Rhea (rē-a)
 - A couple; doublets for Gaia and Uranus
 - Parents or Grandparents to the first Olympian gods

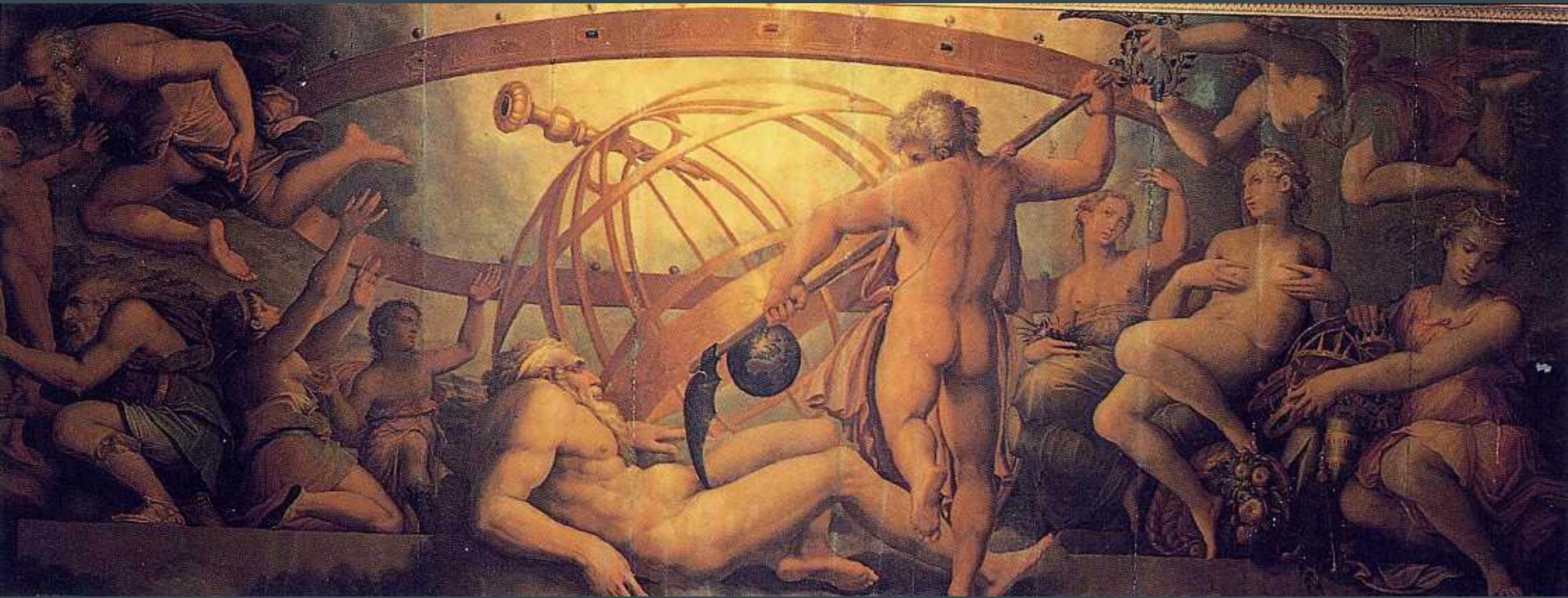
Rhea offers the stone to Cronus
Red-figure ceramic vase, c. 460-450 BCE
Metropolitan Museum of Art, NYC



Children of Hyperion

- Hyperion (Titan; lit. 'he who goes above')
 - Personification of the sun, as sun disc
 - The Sun-god
- Children
 - Helios: sun god, charioteer; the Homeric Hymn dedicated to him portrays him as riding a chariot across the sky
 - Selene: the moon
 - Eos: the dawn
 - Both Selene and Eos have offspring from mortal men, Selene preferring one man in particular while Eos took many lovers

The First Patricide: Cronus vs. Uranus (Hes. Th. 156-87)



Hesiod, Theogony 156-187

Although Uranus and Gaea bore many children, none could come forth into the light, for Uranus hated his own offspring

As soon as each child was conceived, Uranus kept it well hidden,

Refusing it access to light, deep in the womb of the earth,

And gloated over his action, while Gaea groaned in her travail.

But she planned a treacherous scheme. ... She fashioned a terrible sickle.

She told her children her plan ... the wily Cronus bravely replied to his mother...

Her plot worked out as she planned it.

When Uranus came to her presence, bringing with him the darkness,

From ambush Cronus' left hand seized the genital parts of his father.

He reached out his right with the sickle, saw-toothed, deadly, and sharp.

He reached out his right with the sickle, saw-toothed, deadly, and sharp.

Like a reaper, he sliced away the genitals of his own father,

Flinging them over his shoulder, to roll wherever chance sent them.

... Gaea absorbed the gory drops that rained down upon her,

And after a year had passed she bore the frightful Erinyes,

The Giants gleaming in armor, holding long spears in their hands,

And the Melian nymphs, whom mortals reverence all the world over.

The Furies torment Orestes Red-figure vase from South Italy ca. 380 BC (Naples Archaeological Museum)



The Birth of Aphrodite (Hes. Th. 188-206)

As for the genitals, slashed away by the sickle of steel,
Their impetus carried them out from shore to the tide of the sea.
For years the waters swirled them about, as white foam kept oozing
From out the immortal flesh. Within it there grew a maiden
Who drifted first to holy Cythera then on to Cyprus.
There she emerged from the sea as a modest and beautiful goddess
Around whose slim-ankled feet arose all the flowers of springtime.
Gods and mortals alike call her Aphrodite, the Foamborn,
Or else Cythera, to honor the island where first she was seen.
Eros walked by her side, and fair Desire came after
As she joined the race of gods. These are the honors she holds:
Goggling whispers of girls, the smiling deceptions they practice,
As well as the honeyed delights and all the allurements of passion.

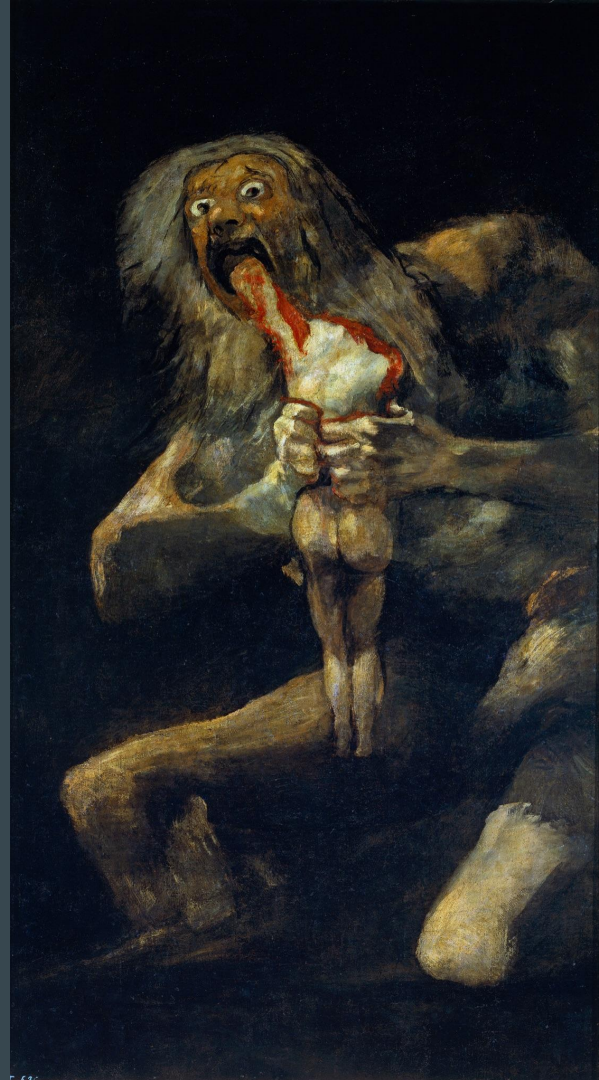
The Birth of Venus Aphrodite

Aphrodite rising from the sea, attended by two Horae (seasons) who stand on the shore, prepared to veil the goddess; Ludovisi Throne, c. 465 BCE; perhaps from Locri, Italy



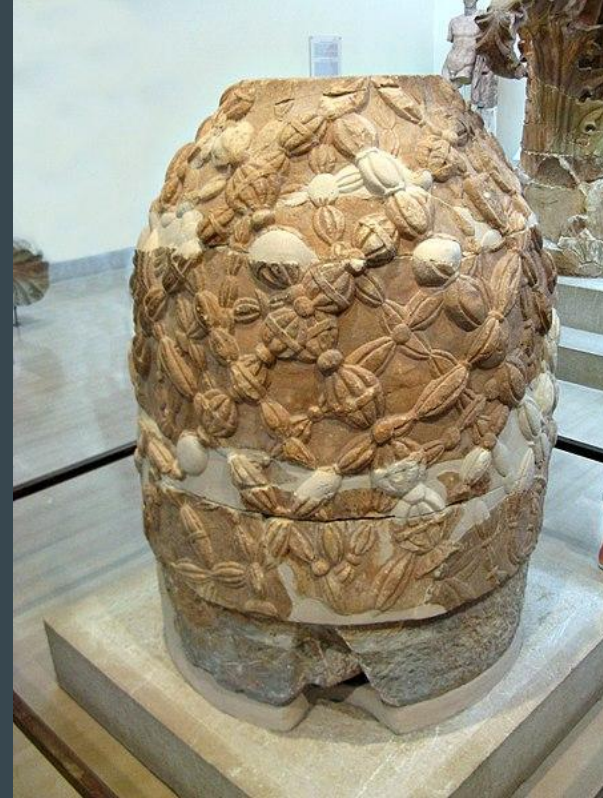
The Second Patricide

- Children of Rhea and Cronus: Hestia, Demeter, Hera, Poseidon, Hades, and Zeus
- Cronus received a prophecy from his parents: one of his children will usurp him
- So he swallowed them all; Rhea wanted to protect them; gave Cronus a stone instead of the infant Zeus
- Zeus was born on Crete, raised on milk from Amalthea (goat) and honey from Melissa (bee)
- The noise from baby Zeus was drowned out by dancing Corybantes, young men or warriors



Saturn Devouring his Son
Francisco Goya, 1820-1823; Museo del Prado, Madrid

The stone became the Omphalos of Delphi



Right: the Omphalos stone displayed outside at Delphi, Greece
Left: the Omphalos in the Archaeological Museum, Delphi

Titanomachy (Titan + *mache*)

- Zeus and his siblings took over Olympus and now ruled the world; but the Titans weren't happy about it!
- Themis & Prometheus sided with Zeus
- Zeus released the Cyclopes from Tartarus; they made the thunderbolt for him
- Atlas punished
- Typhoeus/Typhon, Mt. Etna
- Finally: Metis- "Cleverness"- and Athena

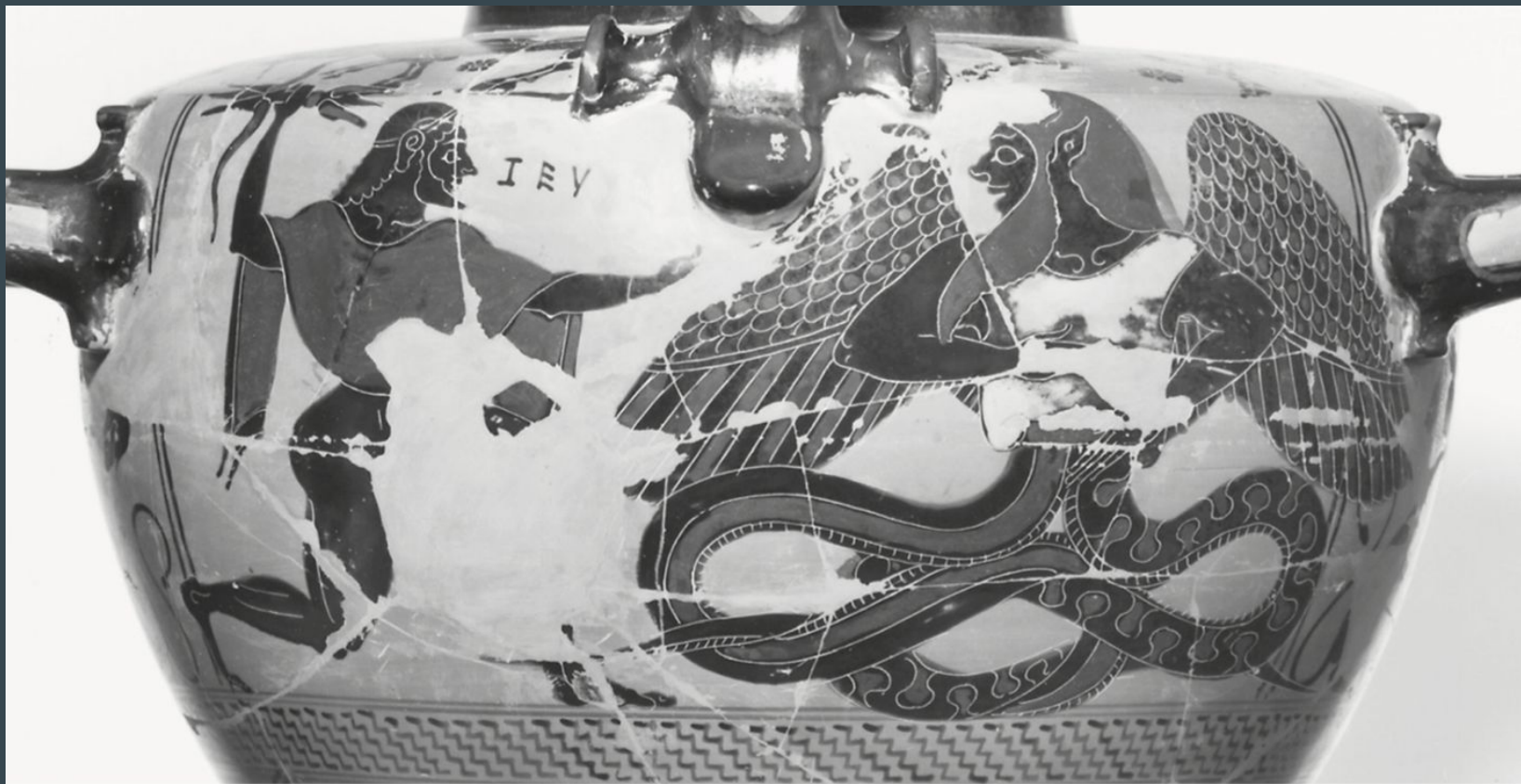


Remember!

Titans: sons of Uranus

Giants: sons of Iapetus and an Oceanid





The Typhonomachy; c. 525 BCE; Zeus brandishes his thunderbolt in his right hand while taking aim with his left; Typhoeus is winged with snaky limbs



The birth of Athena, Attic cup, c. 560 BCE
The British Museum

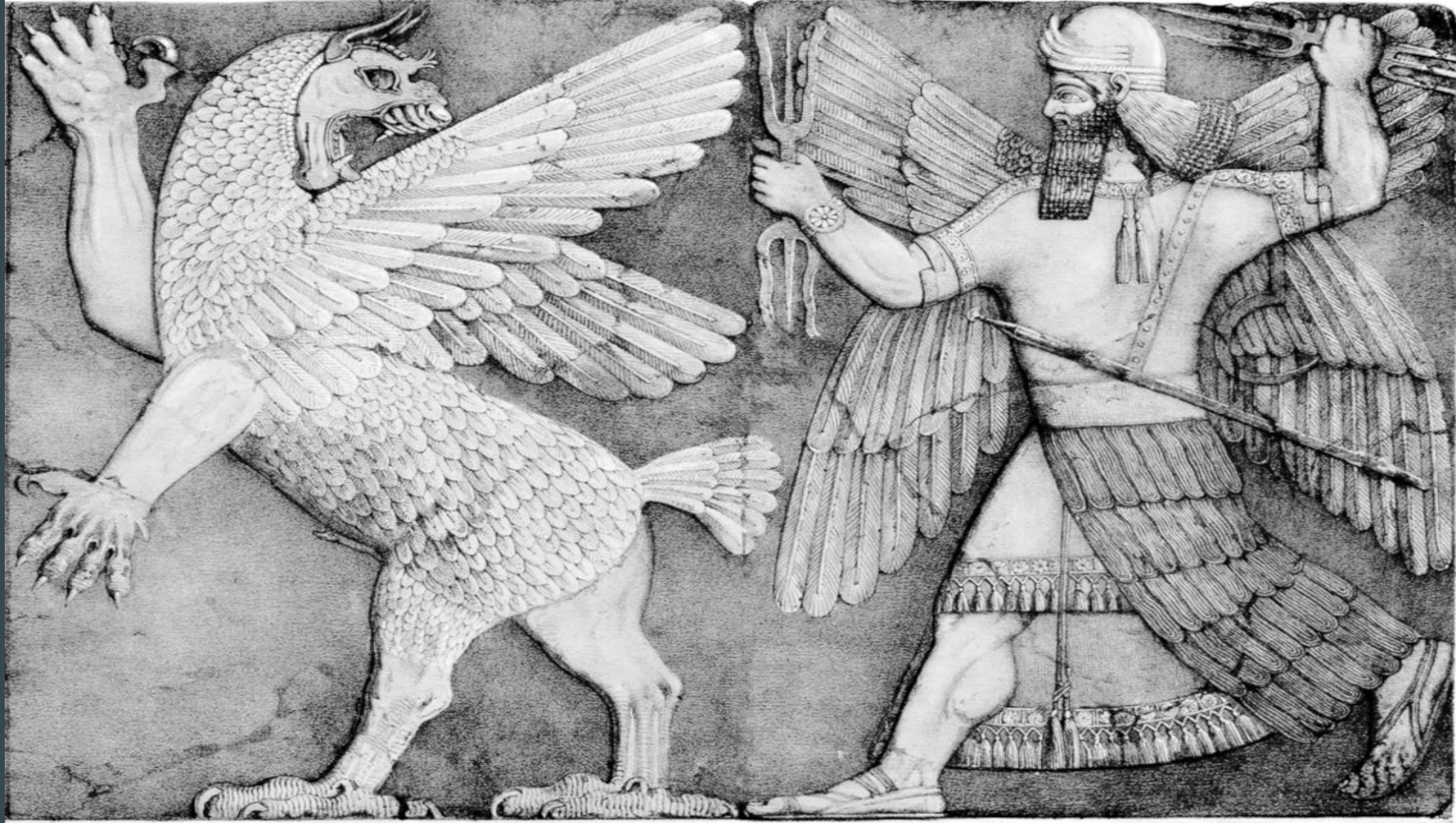
Gigantomachy

- Heracles
- Moirai (Fates)
- Nyx
- Plato: Ananke (Necessity)
- Zeus, Hades, Poseidon
- Zeus- sky, Poseidon- sea, Hades- underworld



Babylonian Cosmogony

- *Enuma Elish*
- Apsu (m.; freshwater), Tiamat (f.; saltwater)
- Lahmu and Lahamu (Mud)
- Anshar and Kishar (Heaven & Earth)
- Ea, Marduk
- Tiamat married Kingu
- Tablet of Destiny



Hebrew Cosmogony

- Monotheistic *fiat*
- Creator using chaotic water as foundation for stable land
- “And the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.”
- Absence of Tiamat/antagonistic deity
- Leviathan



But What Does It All Mean?

- Creation as gradual, generative
- Primacy of Eros as generative agent
- Ascent of male domination over female
- Struggle of succession
- Generational repetition
- Anthropomorphic gods supplanting primordial nature deities
- Reason supplanting wild passion
- Societal functions?

The Origins of Mortals

- Where do human beings come from?
- How are they separate from gods and animals?
- Why do they labor, suffer, and die?

Prometheus

- Literally. “Forethought/Foresight” or “Thief”
- Titanomachy: took Zeus’ side
- Similar to Cronus and Zeus in cunning; the inventor Titan; the folktale trickster figure
- Creator and protector of mortals

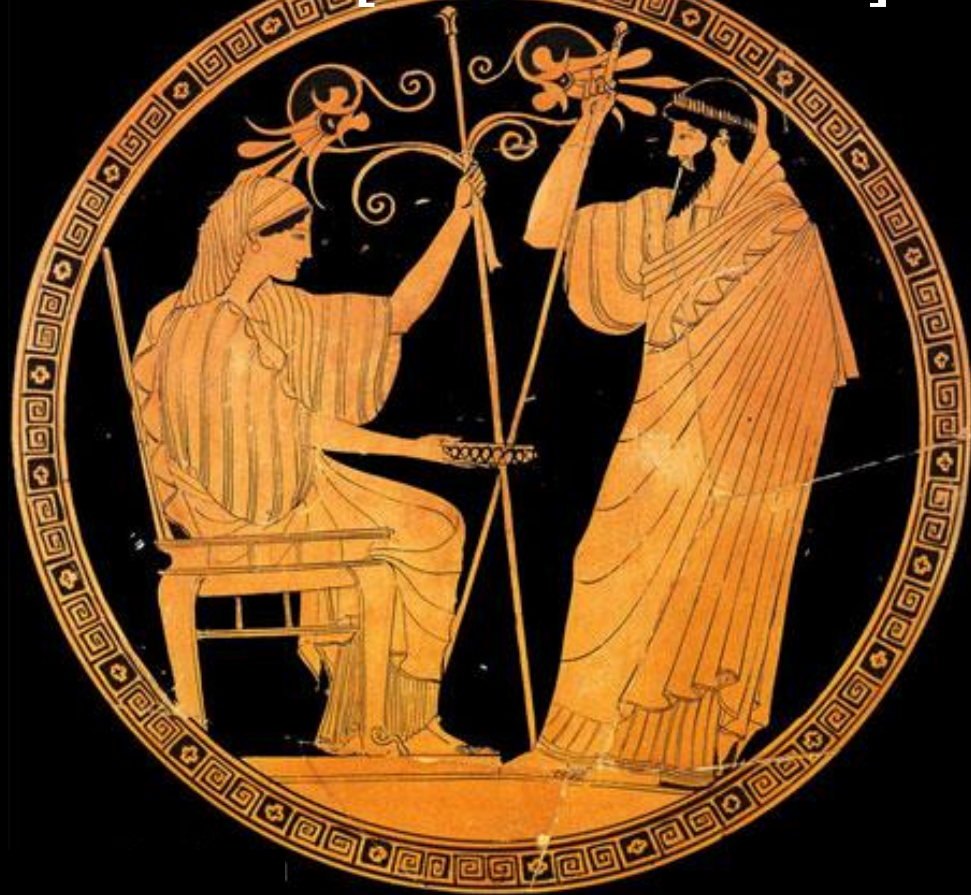
Hera and Prometheus; Athenian red-figure crater
c. 5th cen. BCE; Cabinet des Medailles, Paris



Prometheus — Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.76-86 [43 BCE – 17/18 CE]

An animal blessed with a higher soul was still needed, one abler to reason more deeply, one able to govern the others. So man was born. Perhaps the maker of all things [i.e., Jupiter] produced him of heavenly seed, in hopes of creating a yet better world. ...

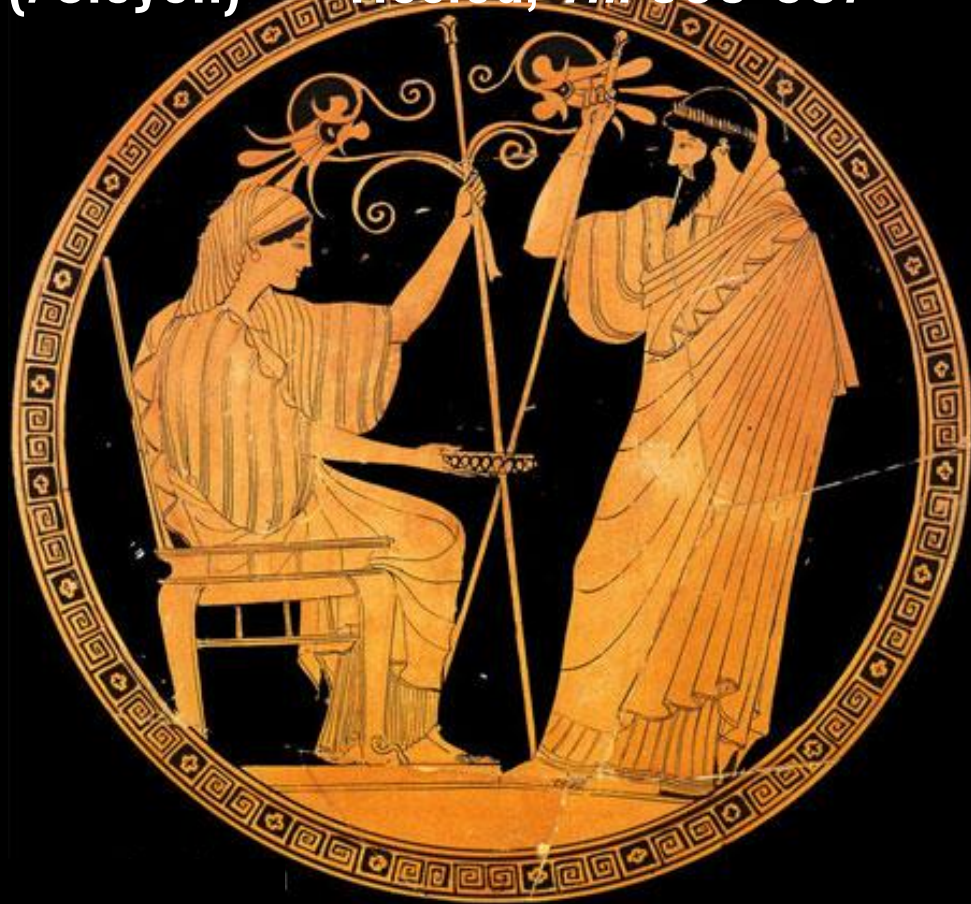
The son of Iapetus fashioned earth and water commingled into the image of the gods, who are rulers of all things created. The other beasts, four-footed, gaze at the earth, looking downward; but man was given a posture which forces his eyes to the heavens, walking erect and lifting his sight to the stars in their courses.



Hera and Prometheus; Athenian red-figure crater c. 5th cen. BCE; Cabinet des Medailles, Paris

Prometheus and Zeus at Meconê (/Sicyon) — Hesiod, *Th.* 535-557

- At a feast for gods and mortals, Prometheus was in charge of distributing the meat; in his trickster nature, he hands Zeus bones wrapped in fat
- Z: 'Haven't you split the portions unequally?'
- P: 'Pick whichever your heart may desire'
- Zeus sees through the trick; eats the bones, but punishes mortals, whom Prometheus especially loves
 - This is an etiological myth (sacrifice)
 - Who is the fool? Hesiodic intervention in favor of Zeus?



Theft of Fire

- Zeus' Punishment: no more fire by his lightning
- Prometheus pitied his beloved mortals; stole fire from Olympus in a stack of fennel;
- Man's labor

Bell krater depicting Prometheus the Fire-Lighter (ca. 400 BCE)



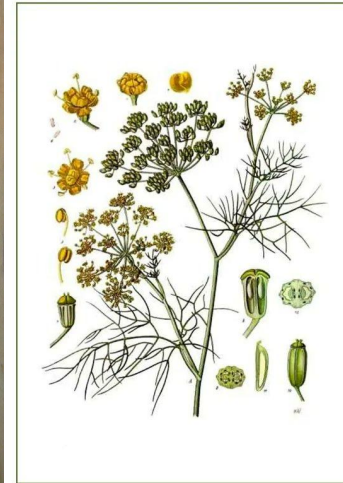
- Prometheus and satyrs on a wine-bowl, c. 420 BCE
- Prometheus uses the fennel stock that conceals the fire to fend off the attacking satyrs who oppose the theft
- This is probably an illustration of a scene from the lost satyre play of Aeschylus *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*



An Ancient Tradition

Fennel stalks are full of a pith that inflames easily and smolders slowly, without burning the stalks themselves. Once emptied in that way, the hollow stalks were used in antiquity to transport live coals.

Wild fennel in the manuscript of Padua, Seminario, 194, f. 63 verso (Seminario Vescovile, Padova, Italy)



Punishment of Prometheus

- Kratos “Strength” and Bia “Violence”
- Caucasus Mountains

He bound Prometheus the schemer in inescapable fetters, / a torment to bear, and through them he drove a mighty stone pylon, / and sent a long-winged eagle to gnaw his incorruptible liver. / By day the bird fed upon it, but each night as much as replenished / as was lost on the day before. [Hes. Th. 521-25]

- Aeschylus: *Prometheus Bound* – no primordial sin
- Freed by Herakles
- Thetis & Achilles



Spartan black-figure cup, 6th cen. BCE. Vatican Museums. Right: Prometheus. Left: Atlas. The snake is probably Ladon, guardian of the tree in the Garden of Hesperides at the end of the world

The Punishment of Man: Women | Hesiod, W&D 42-104

With a nasty smile, the father of men and gods told famous Hephaestus to hurry, to knead the water and clay, to add human speech and strength, to give it a goddess' form and the lovely face of a maiden. Next he ordered Athena to teach her womanly skill, to weave on a well-built loom. Aphrodite the golden he told to crown her head with desire, but with heartbreak as well, and all the aching sorrow of love. Last of all he had Hermes the herald, the killer of Argus, to give her thievish morals, and to add the soul of a bitch.



Red-figure calyx krater by the Niobid Painter, 460 BCE
inv. 1856,1213.1, Trustees of the British Museum

The Punishment of Man: Women | Hesiod, W&D 42-104

[Then Hermes] named the woman Pandora, since all who dwell on Olympus gave her their gifts— a curse to men who must live by bread.

... [Zeus sends Hermes] to bring her to Epimetheus. But he in his folly ignored Prometheus' warning, to accept no gift from Zeus of Olympus but to send it right back, lest it bring eternal trouble to men.



Red-figure calyx krater by the Niobid Painter, 460 BCE
inv. 1856,1213.1, Trustees of the British Museum

The Punishment of Man: Women | Hesiod, W&D 42-104

... [Epimetheus accepts her] Till then men had lived on the face of the earth far from all ills, without torment, pain, or dreadful disease, that bring men down to their graves. But now the hands of the woman lifted the jar's heavy lid and allowed them all to escape, planning the bitterest sorrows for men. Hope only remained in a prison she could not escape, under the lid of the jar.



Red-figure calyx krater by the Niobid Painter, 460 BCE
inv. 1856,1213.1, Trustees of the British Museum

The Punishment of Man: Women

- Pandora “All-gifted”
- Epimetheus “Afterthought/Hindsight”
- Hesiod: both *Theogony* and *W&D*
- This is another etiological (Adam & Eve) to explain the origin of women, marriage, and suffering in the world: like the bones wrapped in fat Prometheus offered Zeus, Zeus now offers man the same deceit of exterior vs. interior
- And like the Biblical Adam and Eve, Epimetheus defies his orders: “Don’t eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil”
- The woman is responsible for suffering in the world



Red-figure calyx krater by the Niobid Painter, 460 BCE
inv. 1856,1213.1, Trustees of the British Museum

The Punishment of Man: Women



Attic



Pandora's Box

- Hesiod never tells us where Pandora got the jar; presumably it contained the gifts of the gods; medieval tradition falsely reported it to be a box, and hence our expression "to open Pandora's box" for "to let loose a host of troubles"



DRINKING BOWL
(SKYPHOS)



↑
DRINKING
(KYLIX)



↑
CUPS
(CANTHAROS)



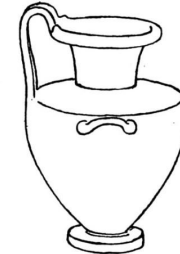
KRATER FOR MIXING
WINE & WATER



AMPHORA FOR
STORING LIQUIDS



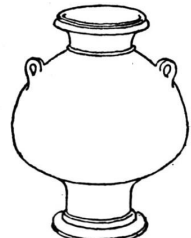
JAR
(STAMNOS)



WATER PITCHER
(HYDRIA)



WINE JUG
(OINOCHOË)



WINE COOLER
(PSYCTER)



OIL JAR
(LEKYTHOS)



CALDRON
(LEBES)



SCENT BOTTLE
(ALABASTRON)

Women as Containers

- In Greek society, women carried water to the house daily, in jars called *hydriae* which often had illustrations of women's daily lives on them
- The word *amnion* is used both for the membrane that surrounds the fetus ('amnion fluid') and for a jar that holds the blood of sacrifice
- In Greek religious ritual, women and girls often carry baskets, including the basket that contained the sacrificial knife hidden in a heap of wheat: the grain is life, the knife is death, which through the shedding of blood guarantees new life
- The basket and its contents, like the women, are a mystery
- The Danaïds, who killed their grooms on their wedding night, were condemned to forever carry water in broken jugs

Women as Containers

Black-figured *hydria*
c. 530 BCE



Hesiodic ~~Ages~~ Races of Man



Golden Race
(in the days of
Cronus)

Silver Race

Bronze Race

Race of Heroes
(Theban Cycles
and Trojan
War)

Iron Race
(Mortal men;
Hesiod's Race)

An Example of Wickedness

- Lycaon: King of Arcadia
- *Xenia* “Guest-friendship”
- *Theoxenia*
- Zeus as god of *Xenia*



The Great Flood

- Deucalion & Pyrrha
- Themis, “Law”, and Gaia’s bones, stones, Gr.: *laas*; cf. *laos*
- Hellen
- Dorus, Aeolus, and Xuthus, father of Ion
- **Dorian, Aeolian, Ionian**



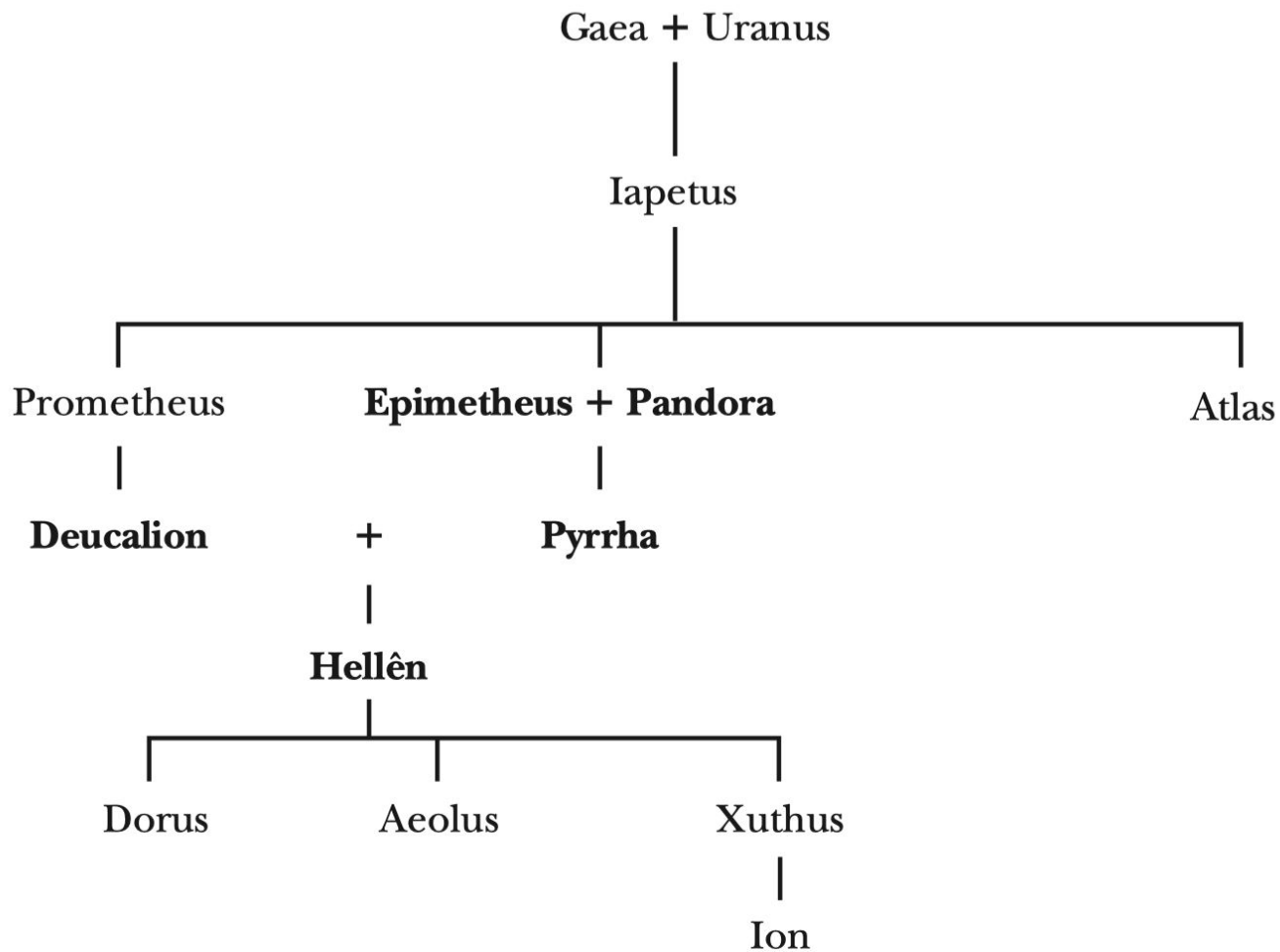


CHART 5 The Descent of the Greek Tribes from the Race of Titans.

Recurring Themes

- Problem of origin
 - Where do gods/people/animals come from?
- Successive stages
 - How did we get from there to here?
- Fall from grace
 - Why is this life full of suffering and toil?
- Anthropology
 - Why are men different from women?

Next class: Quiz

- Monday, 09/23
- 1-2 PM
- **ONLINE on BLACKBOARD** [when you log in on Monday morning you will see a “Quizzes and Exams” content area on the left-hand side menu; download and upload the quiz there
- Upload box will close at exactly 2:05 PM
- Topics: Myth Theories; Cultural Context; Development of Greek Myth; Creation Myth; Origin of Mortals — use PowerPoints and Key Terms lists to prepare
- Structure: 20 multiple-choice questions; 5 points each

Next class: Quiz

- Examples:

Why did Prometheus help mortals? [mark one answer]

- Because he hates Zeus, who loved mortals
- Because he loved mortals
- Because Zeus ordered him to do so
- Because Athena ordered him to do so

Who are the children of Rhea and Cronus?

- Ares, Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, Dionysus, Hephaestus
- Zeus, Hera, Hades, Poseidon, Demeter, Hestia
- The Giants and Cyclopes
- Mankind and the animal world

THE OLYMPIANS

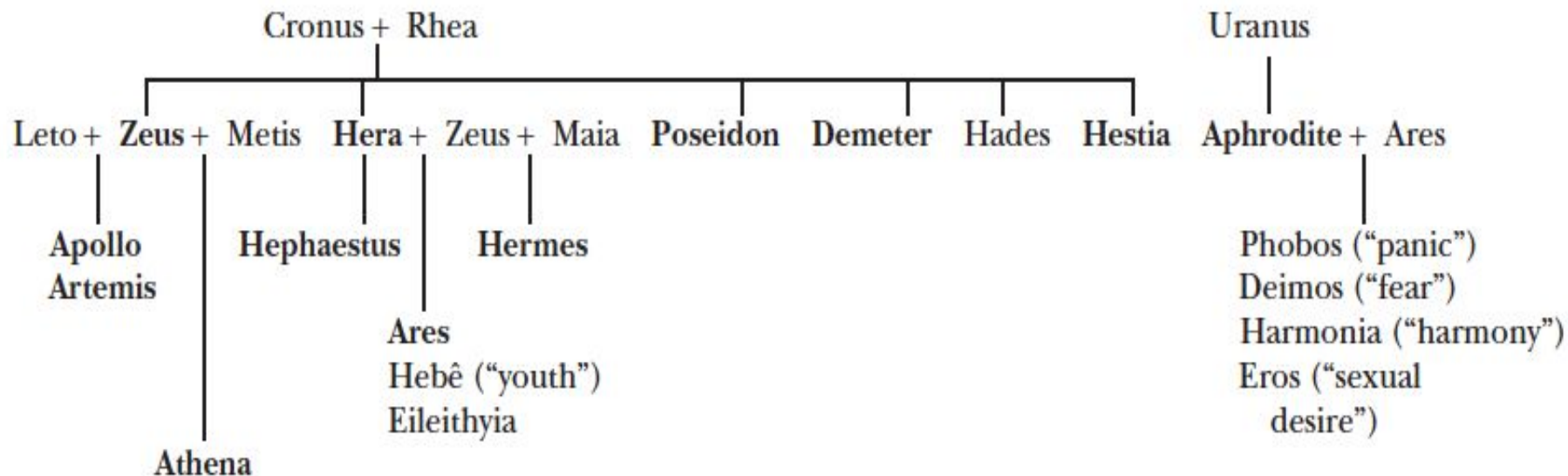


THE OLYMPIANS

- Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter, Hestia
- Aphrodite: born of the severed genitals of Uranus (Hesiod) or daughter of Zeus (Homer)
- Altar of the Twelve Gods: recognizes Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Apollo (music, prophecy, medicine), Artemis (wild animals and the hunt), Hephaestus (the blacksmith god, lord of fire), Athena (wisdom including the art of war), Ares (savage war), Aphrodite (sexuality and desire), Hermes (the trickster god), and Dionysus, who replaced Hestia; Hades, ruler of the underworld, does not live on Mt. Olympus
- Function: these gods were a projection of mortal concerns and activities
- They are modeled after the human household and family



The Twelve Olympians



Zeus, Lord of the Sky

Etymology: Zeus is probably derived from the PIE root di-, 'shine' or 'sky'; he was particularly in charge of the weather; the 'cloud-gatherer'. Zeus was also the father, Zeus pater

The Roman god Jupiter, identified with Zeus, means 'father sky'

Attributes:

- Unmatched strength: 'learn how much stronger am I than all the rest of you gods!' (Homer, Iliad 8.17)
- Zeus' weapon was the thunderbolt, used to defeat the Titans, Giants, and Typhoeus; wherever a lightning struck, the Greeks would erect a shrine to Zeus kataibatês, 'he who descends'
- Associated with bulls and eagles
- Zeus presides over justice (dike), law/customs (nomos); protector of xenia (hence Zeus' reluctant approval of the destruction of Troy)



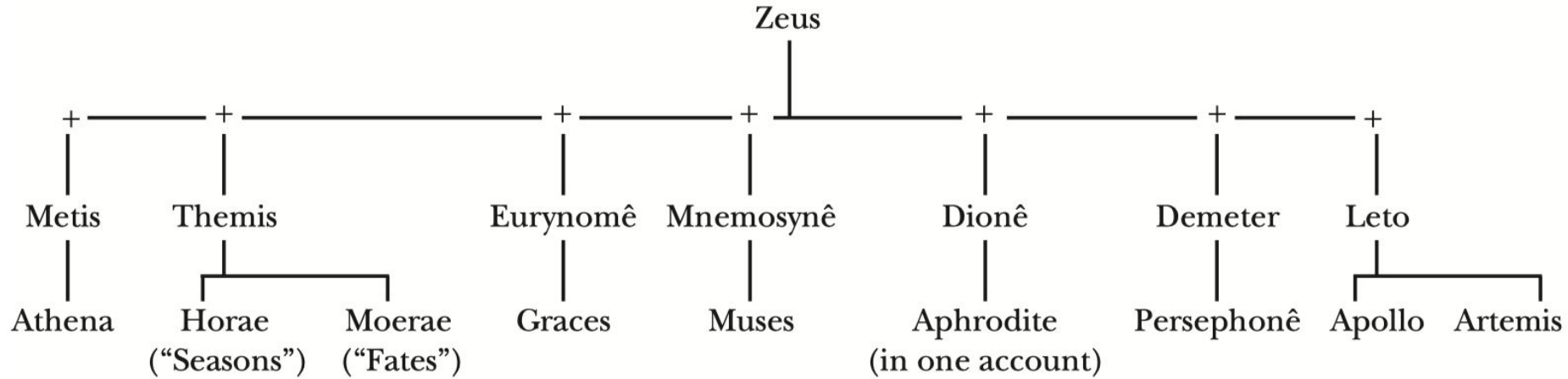
The great temple of Olympian Zeus at Athens, c. 550 BC–AD 130,

The 'aegis' (goat skin), the emblem of Zeus' power, a magical object that instilled fear in all who beheld it; depicted as a shield, often lent to Athena who wears it as a breastplate.

Athena's aegis, with Gorgon, here resembles the skin of the serpent who guards the golden fleece (regurgitating Jason); cup by Douris, early fifth century BC (Vatican Museums)



Zeus: Consorts and Offspring



Zeus and Ganymede

In addition to his relationships with divine and mortal women, Zeus was also a lover of boys, as were most Greeks, especially aristocrats. Zeus fell in love with Ganymede, most beautiful of mortals, a Trojan prince. As Ganymede shepherded his flocks on Mount Ida, Zeus seized him (or sent an eagle to carry him to the Olympus); there, Ganymede remained as cupbearer to the gods, indeed serving the same functions as did young handsome boys in the Greek symposium.

Attic cup, c. 455 BCE



Hera & Zeus

The wedding of Hera and Zeus
Carving from a temple in Silenus
(SW coast of Sicily)

c. 550 BCE

Hera unveils herself, preparing for sexual union with Zeus, while he pulls her closer, seated on his throne and holding her by the arm in a gesture typical of Greek marriage



Hera, Queen of the Sky

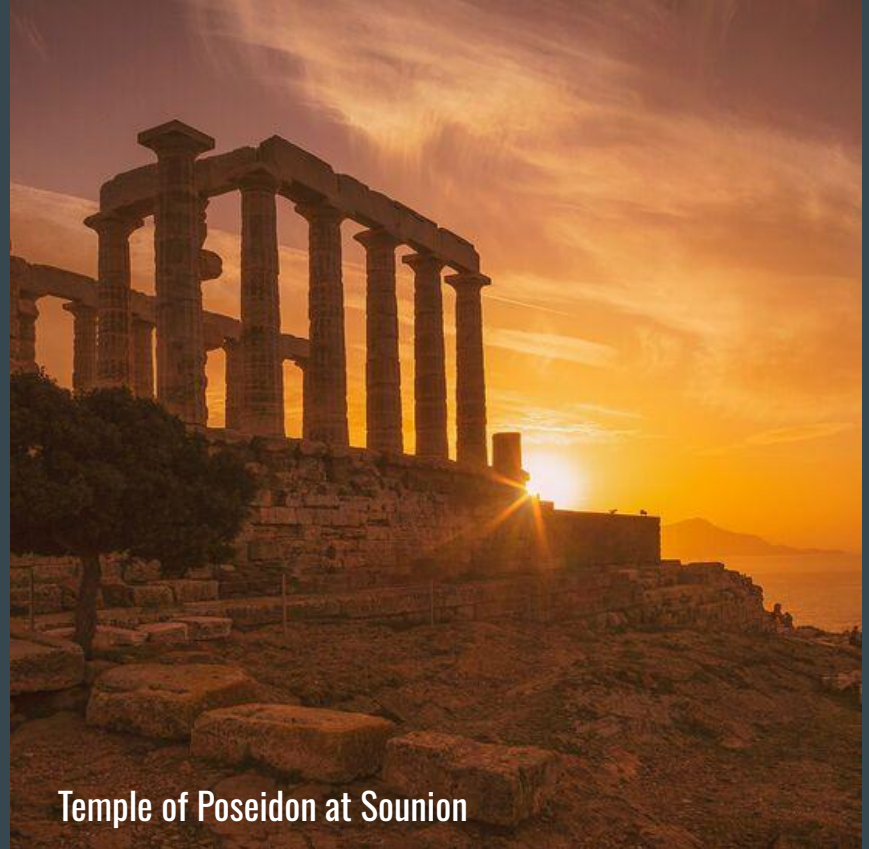
- Goddess of marriage and family; may have been a mother-goddess in earlier times
- The cow was her animal, and in Homer she is referred to as 'cow-eyed'
- Some of the earliest temples in Greece were dedicated to her: Argos, Samos, Olympia
- In characteristic Greek irony, Zeus is an unfaithful husband, and Hera takes vengeance on his many lovers and offspring; especially the hero Herakles
- Her children with Zeus: Ares, "most hated of the gods", Eileithyia, childbirth, and Hebê, 'youth'. All three are insignificant in Greek myth
- Hephaestus is Hera's son, conceived asexually as a response to Athena's birth



The temple of Hera at Olympia ~~in the great sanctuary to Zeus~~, c. 600 BC.

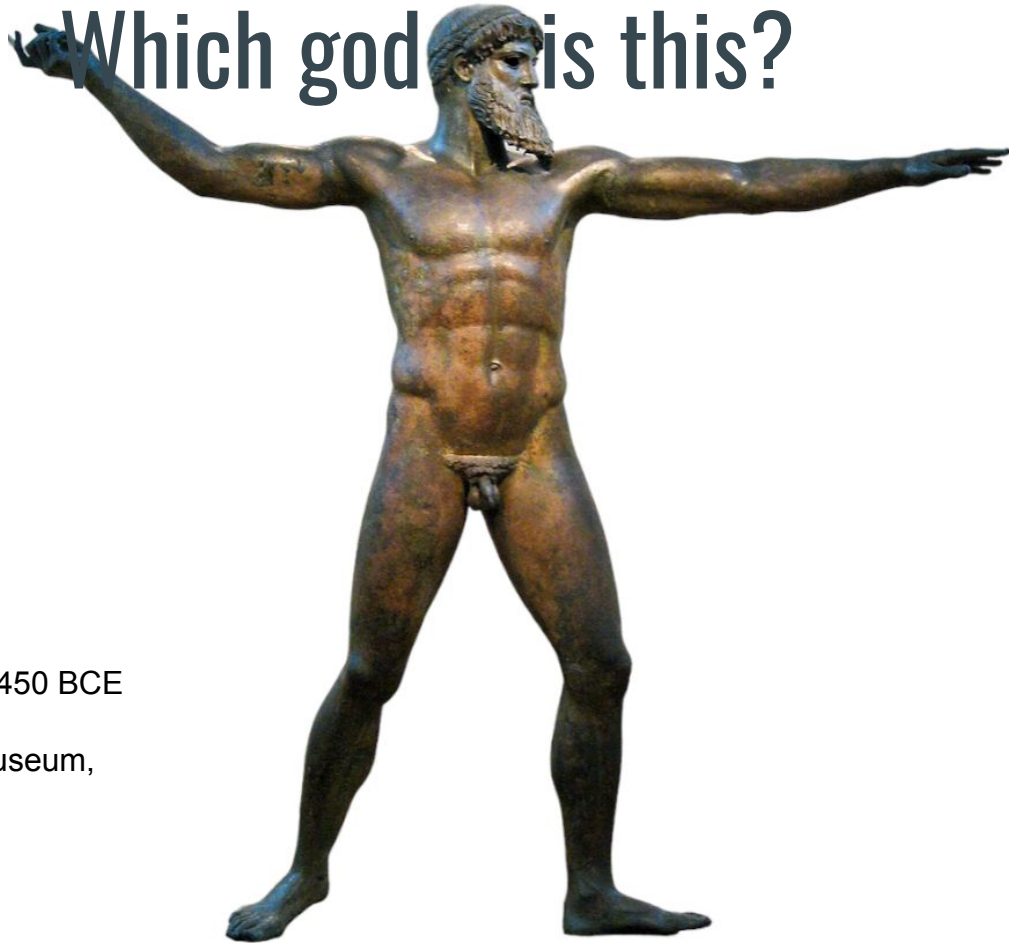
- Unlike Zeus, Poseidon did not favor humans; he is associated with the terrifying movements of the earth and sea and the untamed energy of wild horses; Homer calls him 'shaker of earth'
- His name might mean 'wheat husband', which would explain his association with Demeter and a myth of his pursuing of her; this is connected to a horse-headed statue of Demeter
- In Pylos, on Linear B tablets, Poseidon's name is evident and might have been the chief god instead of Zeus
- His arch-rival was Athena
- Poseidon is the father of the Cyclops Polyphemus, who trapped and lost Odysseus
- Poseidon was considered a cruel and dangerous god
- In cult, he accepted drowned horses

Poseidon, Lord of the Deep



Temple of Poseidon at Sounion

Which god is this?



The Artemision Bronze, c. 450 BCE
2 meters (6.5/6)
National Archaeological Museum,
Athens

Hades, King of the Underworld

- Together with his brothers Zeus and Poseidon, Hades shared governance of the cosmos (universe)
- The name means 'The Invisible'; he has a helmet or cloak that makes him unseen
- It was considered dangerous to utter his name, so he was often referred to as Pluto, 'The Wealthy'
- He abducted and married his niece, Persephone, Demeter's daughter

Hades/Serapis with Cerberus,
mid-2nd century AD statute
from the Sanctuary of the
Egyptian Gods at Gortyna



List of Terms

- Zeus
- Aegis
- Xenia
- Ganymede
- Hera
- Poseidon
- Hades
- Anthropomorphism

Apollo, the Far-Shooter, Lord of the Silver Bow

- The origin or meaning of the name Apollo is unknown
- Epithet: e.g. Far-Darter, Earth Shaker, Kataibates, Lord of Mice
- Not attested in Linear B, but became important by the 8th c.
- In winter, stayed with the Hyperboreans, “People beyond the North Wind”
- Lord of archery, medicine, music, prophecy
- The *Iliad*: Chryses
- Delos & Delphi (Python)

The Apollo Belvedere (also called the Belvedere Apollo, Apollo of the Belvedere, or Pythian Apollo) dated to mid-way through the 2nd century A.D. and is considered to be a Roman copy of an original bronze statue created between 330 and 320 B.C. by the Greek sculptor Leochares.
Vatican Museums, Vatican City



Apollo, the Far-Shooter, Lord of the Silver Bow

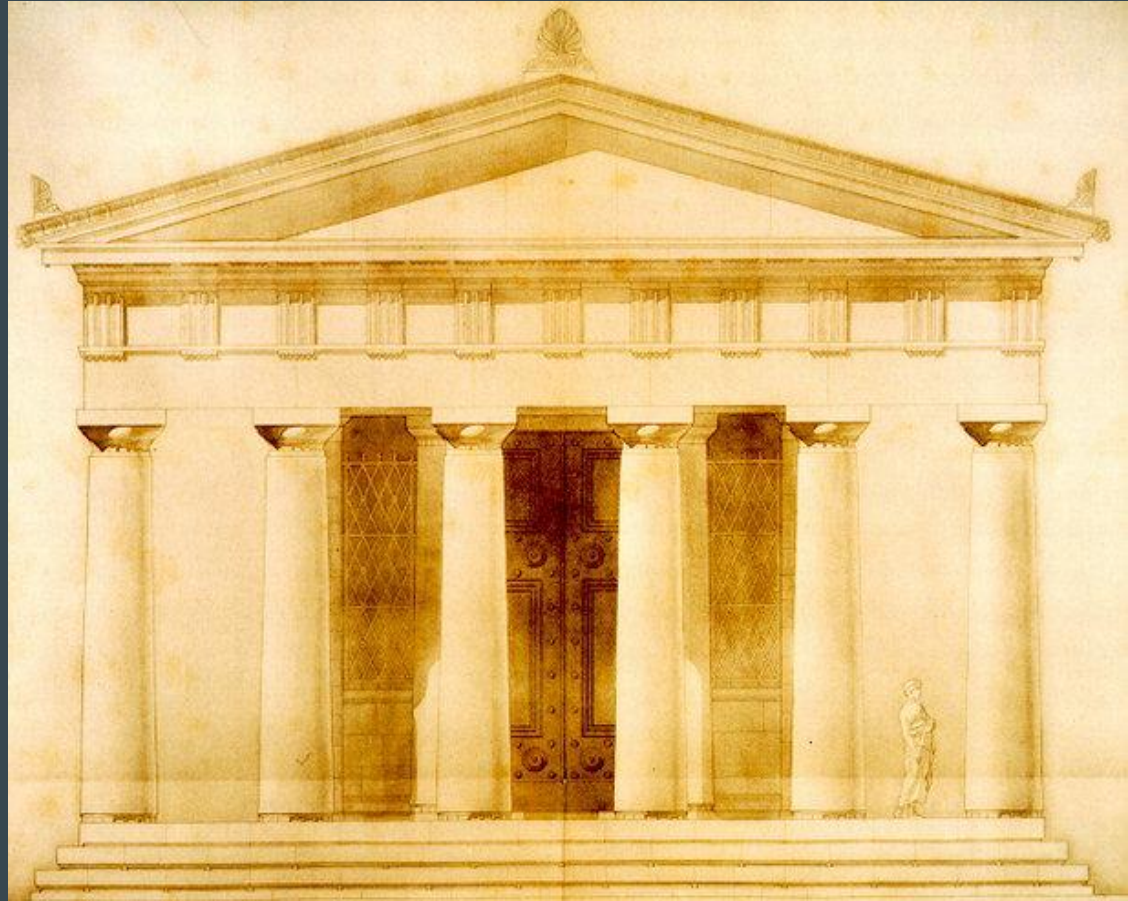
The large white marble sculpture is 2.24 m (7.3 feet) high. Its complex contrapposto has been much admired, appearing to position the figure both frontally and in profile. The arrow has just left Apollo's bow and the effort impressed on his musculature still lingers. His hair, lightly curled, flows in ringlets down his neck and rises gracefully to the summit of his head, which is encircled with the strophium, a band symbolic of gods and kings. His quiver is suspended across his right shoulder. He is entirely nude except for his sandals and a robe (chlamys) clasped at his right shoulder, turned up on his left arm, and thrown back.

The lower part of the right arm and the left hand were missing when discovered and were restored by Giovanni Angelo Montorsoli (1507–1563), a sculptor and pupil of Michelangelo.



Birth at Delos

- *Homeric Hymns*
 - *H. H. To Apollo*
- Leto
- Delos and Ortygia
- Poor, barren, desolate
- Pisistratus cleansed Delos
 - 561 BCE
- Delian League
 - 478 BCE
 - 454 BCE
- The lyre: dance and song, like poets, hence god of male elites



Establishment at Delphi

- Oracle
- Telphusa
 - Nymph of spring in Boeotia
- Parnassus
- Python
 - Etymology “to rot”
- Epithet: Pythian
- *Delphis*
 - “Dolphin”
- *Miasma*
 - Valley of Tempe







Greek Oracles: Delphi | Temple of Apollo



Greek Oracles: Delphi | Temple of Apollo



Greek Oracles: Delphi | Temple of Apollo

The Delphic Oracle

- Center of the (Greek) world
- c. 800 BCE - 390 CE
- Pythia
- *Adytum*
 - “Not to be entered”
- Dactylic hexameter
- *Gnothi Seauton*
 - “Know Thyself”
- *Meden Agan*
 - “Act Moderatly”



Delphi: The World's Navel

According to myth, Zeus released two eagles, one from the east and the other from the west, to indicate the center of the world. They met directly over Delphi – and now a sacred stone marks the spot, the Omphalos. Nearby stood the impressive sanctuary of Apollo, home to the most important oracle of antiquity. According to tradition, the oracle originally belonged to Gaia (Mother Earth), who lived there with her son Python. But the god Apollo killed Python and founded his own sanctuary, the Temple of Apollo.



Delphi Archaeological Museum, Greece



Art by Mateusz Przeklasa

Delphi: The Pythia

- Purification rituals: ashing in the nearby Castalian Spring, burning laurel leaves, and drinking holy water
- Sacrifice of animal (usually a goat)
- Offering of the *pelanos* (dish) by visiting party
- Pythia descends into IadytonI: lower chamber in which a burning *Hestia* was burning with marley meal and laurel leaves
- Pythia seats on a covered tripod cauldron, over a deep chasm [a well?]

Apollonian Qualities

- Severity
 - Plague
- Shamanism
 - Prophecy
 - Medicine
- Culture
 - Music (Lyre)
 - Art
- Greek civilization



Apollo's Unhappy Loves

- Cassandra
- Sibyl at Cumae
- Daphne
- Hyacinth
- Coronis
 - Asclepius
 - Chiron

Apollo and Daphne
Bernini, 1622-1625
Galleria Borghese, Rome



Apollo's Unhappy Loves

- Cassandra
- Sibyl at Cumae
- Daphne
- Hyacinth
- Coronis
 - Asclepius
 - Chiron

Apollo and Daphne
Benzi, 1656-1740
Cleveland Museum of Art, OH



List of Terms

- Apollo
- Delphi
- Delos
- Pythia
- Cassandra
- Asclepius

Hermes

- *Herma*
 - “Stone heap”
 - Ergo, “He of the stone heap”
- Attributes
 - Travelers
 - Trickery
 - Thieves
 - Merchants
 - Heralds
 - Psychopomp
 - Liminality
- Caduceus
 - Carried by heralds
- Traveler’s cap
- Winged boots/sandals



The child sprang into the light, to bring about wonderful things.
Maia's infant was clever— a swindler, a robber, a liar, Rustler of cattle, fast talker, a burglar and cracker of safes,
Who promptly practiced his tricks even on the wisest immortals

Hermes vs. Apollo: myth

The Homeric Hymn to Hermes, which tells the story of the god's birth and his subsequent theft of Apollo's sacred cattle, invokes him as the one "of many shifts (polytropos), blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, a watcher by night, a thief at the gates, one who was soon to show forth wonderful deeds among the deathless gods."

The epithet *polutropos* ("of many shifts, turning many ways, of many devices, ingenious, or much wandering") is also used to describe Odysseus in the first line of the *Odyssey*. In addition to the lyre, Hermes was believed to have invented many types of racing and the sport of wrestling and therefore was a patron of athletes.



FIGURE 8.2 Hermes and the cattle of Apollo, Attic vase, c. 490 BC. Hermes, back in Maia's cave, huddles down in his basket cradle after stealing Apollo's cattle. Wrapped in his swaddling clothes, he still wears his traveler's cap (*petasos*). Maia, to his left, reproves him for the theft, while one cow licks the cradle. (Photo Vatican Museums)

Hermes vs. Apollo: kakoi & aristoi

- Apollo: associated with the elite members of society
- His instrument is the lyre, like the elite man who'll entertain friends
- Identified with the kouros statue, portraying a young male in his prime
- Kouroi: used as gravestones by wealthy elites
- Hermes: associated with the larger Athenian democratic citizen body
- Inventor of the lyre, like the humble poet who composes the poetry that's later recited by elites
- Seen in the *herm* as the face of any adult man; the phallus brings together the identity of the citizens





Hephaestus

- Latin: Vulcan
- Lemnos
 - The Tyrsenoi
 - Hephaestias
 - Landed there (Il.)
 - Active volcano
- Attributes
 - Forge
 - Craft
 - Volcanoes
 - Fire of the forge
 - Civilization, the Agora (temple)
 - The ugly and lame god (physiognomy)
- Shield of Achilles
- Aphrodite



Hephaestus

Return to Olympus:

Homer gives two accounts

Zeus: fell to Lemnos

Hera: into the sea, rescued by Tethis

Return to Olympus – no literary account from the Classical period, despite the scene being often depicted in art



Hephaestus

Return to Olympus:
Later accounts tell of his
anger at Hera
Dionysus brought him
to Olympus to free Hera



FIGURE 8.5 The return of Hephaestus to Olympus, on an Attic vase, c. 430 BC. Hephaestus, drunk, crowned with ivy, is supported by a satyr, while Dionysus, to the far right, leads him to Olympus. Hephaestus carries the blacksmith's tools, a hammer in his left hand and tongs in his right. (Museum Antiker Kleinkunst, Munich/Hirmer Fotoarchiv, Munich, Germany)



Hephaestus, Aphrodite, and Ares

But the minstrel struck the chords in prelude to his sweet lay and sang of the love of Ares and Aphrodite of the fair crown, how first they lay together in the house of Hephaestus secretly; and Ares gave her many gifts, and shamed the bed of the lord Hephaestus. But straightway one came to him with tidings, even Helios, who had marked them as they lay together in love. And when Hephaestus heard the grievous tale, he went his way to his smithy, pondering evil in the deep of his heart, and set on the anvil block the great anvil and forged bonds which might not be broken or loosed, that the lovers might bide fast where they were. ... And near to them came the famous god of the two strong arms, having turned back before he reached the land of Lemnos; for Helios had kept watch for him and had brought him word. So he went to his house with a heavy heart, and stood at the gateway, and fierce anger seized him. ... and the gods gathered to the house of the brazen floor. Poseidon came, the earth-enfolder, and the helper Hermes came, and the lord Apollo, the archer god. Now the goddesses abode for shame each in her own house, but the gods, the givers of good things, stood in the gateway; and unquenchable laughter arose among the blessed gods as they saw the craft of wise Hephaestus.



Ares

- “Curser” (Linear B)
- Thrace
- Aphrodite
 - Deimos “Terror”
 - Phobos “Fear”
 - Harmonia “Harmony”
 - Eros (contra Hesiod)





List of Terms

- Hermes
- herm
- Caduceus
- *psychopompos*
- Maia
- Hephaestus
- Lemnos
- Ares

Gods vs. Goddesses

- Male gods: range of spheres not always explicable (are they not?)
 - Female goddesses: largely concerned with matters of the fecund forces in the world
 - Demeter, agriculture; Hestia, the life of the household, the heart; Hera, marriage and family
 - Aphrodite: the force of desire
 - Artemis: the wealth of the wild
 - Athena: crafts, especially weaving *
- = Greek 'female power' – the power of the creation of life



Aphrodite

- The overwhelming power of desire
- Accompanied by Eros – either as her child by Ares or as a cosmic force
- Despite the link between her Hesiodic creation myth and the Greek word *aphros*, foam, she is not originally Greek
- She ‘migrated’ to Greece from the Near East, and her name is a distortion of that of Eastern fertility goddesses: Inanna, Ishtar, Astratê
- Aphrodite came to Greece on Cyprus, where she was worshipped as early as the 12th cen. BCE in an unanimated form
- She also had a strong cult on Cythera
- Hence she is often referred to as Cypris or Cytherea





Archaeological Museum of Cyprus
Paphos, Cyprus

Sacred Prostitution



- An Eastern practice, in which women would voluntarily dedicate their lives to the goddess, and in her temple serve as priestesses who lay with men who pay in the form of dedications to the goddess
- A form of maiden sacrifice – instead of her actual life, the maiden gives up, sacrifices her virginity
- The Greeks did not practice this form of worship
- Not even on Corinth, despite what the textbook says!
- Instead, Aphrodite had a strong affiliation with the sea, too, and in Corinth, her temple stood overlooking the sea; she was the patron of Corinth
- Sailors from all over the ancient world would come to Corinth because of its isthmus – a narrow land bridge that connects the Peloponnese peninsula with the rest of the mainland of Greece, near the city of Corinth, linking the Ionian Sea with the Aegean, effectively turning the Peloponnese peninsula into an island, and creating an international maritime hub that transformed navigation in southern Europe. The Isthmus was known in the ancient world as the landmark separating the Peloponnese from mainland Greece
- And where sailors go – prostitution follows

Sappho / Fr. 1 (To Aphrodite) [tr. Anne Carson 2003]

Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind,
child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you
do not break with hard pains,
 O lady, my heart

but come here if even before
you caught my voice far off
and listening left your father's
 golden house and came,

yoking your car. And fine birds brought you,
quick sparrows over the black earth
whipping their wings down the sky
 through midair—

they arrived. But you, blessed one,
smiled in your deathless face

and asked what (now again) I have suffered and why
 (now again) I am calling out

and what I want to happen most of all
in my crazy heart. Who should I persuade (now again)
to lead you back into her love? Who, O
Sappho, is wronging you?

For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
If she does not love, soon she will love
 even unwilling.

Come to me now: loose me from hard
care and all my heart longs
to accomplish, accomplish. You
 be my ally.

Aphrodite's offspring: Hermaphroditus and Priapus

- Hermaphroditus was the son of Aphrodite and Hermes
- Known to be extremely beautiful, he was noticed by the nymph Salmacis, who convinced him to lay with her. Unexperienced, he run away from her. Later, when he dipped in a spring to bath, she leapt out of the water and seized him strongly, obsessed. They two merged into one being with a woman's breasts and a penis.
- Priapus, sired by either Dionysus or Hermes, was originally an Asiatic garden-deity connected to fertility by his enormous erect penis, which granted him apotropaic qualities (like the Athenian herm). The name is not Greek, he does not appear in Greek culture until later, in the Hellenistic period, when he was favored especially by the Romans



Pygmalion



Pygmalion

- The Roman poet Ovid (Ovidius) tells the myth in his *Metamorphosis*
- Pygmalion, king of Cyprus, had become disgusted with the immoral behavior of the unchaste Cypriote women
- And so, he carved himself a statue of a maiden, “possession a beauty greater than any mortal woman could ever hope to attain”
- Very quickly, he “conceived a passion for the product of his own hand”
- On the feast celebrating Aphrodite, Pygmalion prayed for a wife “like his iron maiden”
- Aphrodite granted his wish and turned the statue alive: her name was Galatea, and she gave birth to Paphos – the name of Aphrodite’s sacred city on Cyprus

Ovid is the only account to refer to Paphos as a girl; usually, he is a boy, who then has Cinyras, whose wife boasted that their daughter, Myrrha, was more beautiful than Aphrodite herself – for which the goddess punished Myrrha to fall in love with her own father; myth says she lured him and lay with him for 12 nights; when he found out it was his daughter, he meant to kill her, but the gods, showing mercy, turned her into myrrh tree; her tears were the resin myrrh, burned on the altar of Aphrodite

Cinyras killed himself from shame; nine months later the tree split open and Adonis was born

Adonis

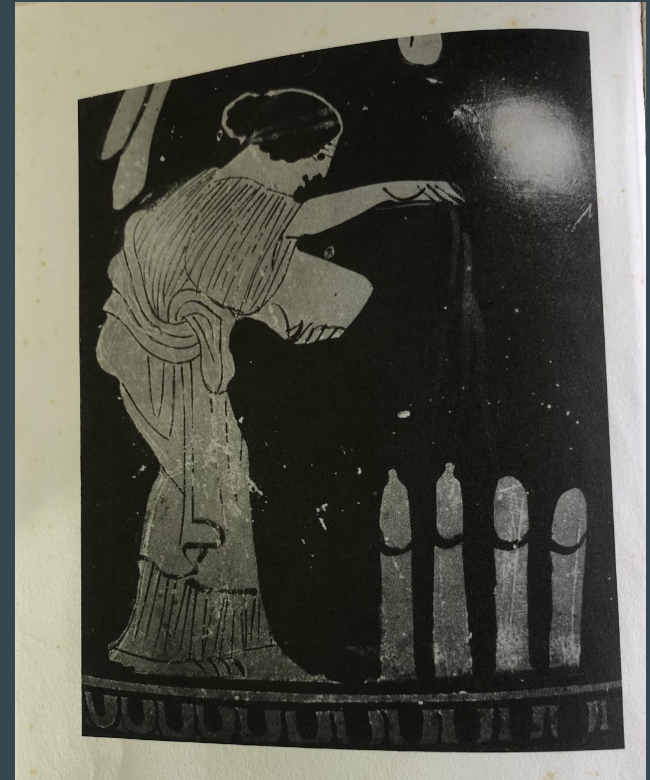
- This myth, too, is of Eastern origin: Adonis means 'lord' in ancient Semitic languages; today, 'Adonai' is still used in Judaism to refer to god – however, no extant Eastern literature mentions this story
- When Aphrodite saw Adonis emerge from the tree she immediately fell in love; he, however, only wanted to hunt
- She warned him not to pursue too big of a game, but he ignored her, hunted a boar, who got him in his thigh. As he slowly bled to death, Aphrodite turned his blood into the bright-red anemone flower
- Parallel myths?



The Adonis Uffizi, made from pentelic marble, 2nd century BCE, currently held in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Italy

Adonis

- The Adonia festival was celebrated in his name, seemingly mostly in Athens and later in the Hellenistic period throughout the Near East and even Alexandria
- The festival occurred annually, and it was organized and celebrated by women, exclusively
- Citizens, foreigners, prostitutes, and respectable women alike all took part
- Over the course of the festival, women would climb to the roof of their houses, where they would dance, sing, and celebrate the memory of Adonis, as well as mourn his death
- They planted “Gardens of Adonis” on the roof, lettuce and fennel seeds, planted in baskets



Artemis

- Her name is not Greek, but her cult is very old, reaching back to the Paleolithic Period, pre-10,000 BCE
- Homer's epithet for her is Pontia Theron, 'mistress of the wild animals'
- This title is related to her representations in Bronze Age art, where we often see an image of a woman, sometimes winged, enthroned between a pair of wild animals
- Therefore, originally Artemis was a mother-goddess, a protectress of the young: animals and humans alike



Artemis

- Her most important site was her temple on Ephesus, one of the largest Greek temples ever built, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
- There, her cult image showed her with dozens of breasts on her chest
- However, in Greek culture, Artemis is one of the maiden goddesses, but unlike Athena, she bears no masculine qualities, and is not truly asexual









Artemis and Actaeon

- While hunting near Thebes, Actaeon accidentally came across Artemis as she was bathing in a spring
- Deeply abashed, Artemis cursed him and turned Actaeon into a stag
- His hounds – 35 in number – turned on him and devoured him
- The myth is parallel to Agamemnon's myth about the sacrifice of Iphigenia to Artemis (ensuring the success of the hunt)



Artemis and Callisto

- Callisto was Artemis' most devout follower, and like the goddess she too swore an oath of chastity
- However, Zeus saw her and took her
- One day as Artemis and her followers were bathing in the spring, Callisto disrobed and revealed to them her pregnancy
- Angry, Artemis turned Callisto into a bear
- Other versions: Zeus turned her into a bear to hide her; Hera turned her into a bear in revenge
- Bauron: a sanctuary for Artemis near Athens, where young girls, pre-marriage, would go and dress as bears



Aphrodite vs. Artemis

- As we have seen today, Aphrodite and Artemis may be viewed as rivals
- While Aphrodite represents the sexually read and sexually active woman, Artemis is the maiden who is sexually not ready; she has just matured from childhood into a woman
- Therefore, the two goddesses symbolize very different stages in a woman's life
- They are the different forces that operate on women
- Their opposition and rivalry can perhaps be best seen in the tragedy by Euripides, the *Hippolytus*, in which the Athenian king Theseus' bastard son with an Amazon queen rejects Aphrodite entirely, devoting himself instead to Artemis— and is punished for it horribly by the goddess of desire (text available on BB)

List of Terms

- Aphrodite
- Cypris
- Cytherea
- Hermaphroditus
- Priapus
- Pygmalion
- Adonis, Adonia
- Artemis
- Potnia Theron
- Ephesus
- Actaeon
- Callisto

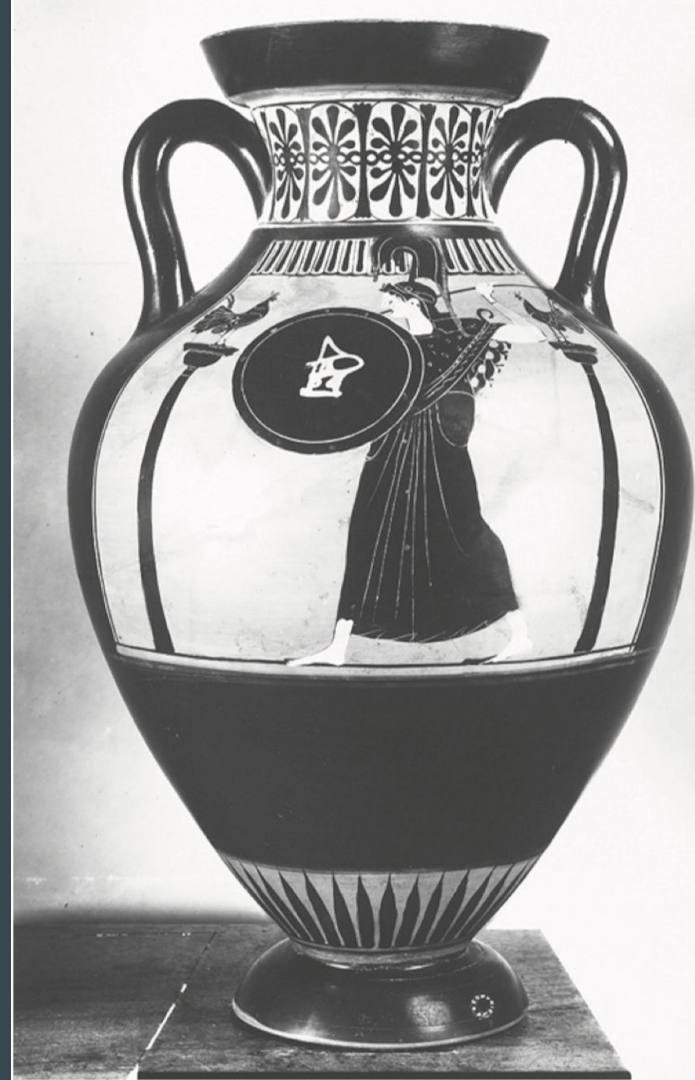
Athena – attributes

- Her name is derived from Athens, not the other way around
- In original she probably was not Greek, but established in Greece early on
- The name is mentioned in Linear B tablets
- Perhaps she was the deity protecting Athens, which was then merely the Acropolis
- In the Classical period, the *parthenon* was built for her there ('place/house of the virgin')
- Her emblem:
 - The owl
 - The olive tree
- Common epithet: glaukôpis, 'owl-eyed'/'gray-eyed'
- Protectress of cities, she gave mortals crafts and arts that make city life possible



Pallas Athena

- Goddess of strategic war, Athena is always depicted in full armor
- She wears Zeus' aegis as a breastplate or as a cloak around her shoulders (depending on the interpretation of the aegis)
- Pallas Athena:
- A Giant whom she slayed in the Gigantomachy, thus granting Athena with the epithet Pallas Athena
- She created the aegis from his skin (different versions!)
- The name Pallas is of unclear etymology; if Greek it could mean 'maiden' or 'weapon-brandishing' but if pre-Greek, the name's meaning is unclear



Athena's birth

Born from Zeus' head, Athena aligned herself with the father, and with male heroes such as Odysseus, Perseus (Medusa), Heracles, Jason (Golden Fleece). In the *Iliad* (by Homer; Trojan War), she assists her favorites in battle:

And with them when Athena, she of the steel-gray eyes,
Wearing the dreaded aegis, shield which is ageless,
immortal. ... Sparkling, bright with its gleam,
Athena marched down the ranks, arousing their will to
attack. In every heart she injected new courage to fight
to the end, and suddenly war seemed sweeter...

[Homer, *Iliad* 2.446-455]



Athena vs. Poseidon

While Poseidon sired the first wild horse, Arion, from his coupling with Demeter, Athena is credited with building the first chariot and bridle, the tools to tame horses. Likewise, she invented the ship, which overcomes the wild seas (= Poseidon)

The story of Athena and Poseidon's contest is one of the founding myths of ancient Athens. The story begins in a mythical time when the city was founded. Its first king was Cecrops, a man of tremendous interest and importance for the ancient Athenians.



Athena vs. Poseidon

A common belief amongst the Greeks was that certain people were **autochthones**, i.e., born directly out of the earth. This meant that someone had natural rights to a certain land, and, as such, many Greek city-states boasted that their ancestors were autochthones. Cecrops was one of these cases. He was a legendary king whose autochthony was so strong that he was half snake and half man. As snakes crawl, they are seen as creatures closer to the earth. In this case, the fact that Cecrops was half-snake indicated that he was inextricably linked to the land on which ancient Athens was built.



Athena vs. Poseidon

Cecrops was an amazing ruler. His reign ushered in a golden age so impressive that even the gods noticed his city's greatness. Athena and Poseidon were the two gods that showed interest in Cecrops' city. Both believed they had the right to bring the city under their protection, name it after themselves, and claim its glory.



Athena vs. Poseidon

Athena and Poseidon met on the sacred hill of the Acropolis. Zeus, the Olympian gods, and the people of Athens gathered to witness the spectacle.

Poseidon moved first. With one swift move, he struck his trident on the ground. The earth shook, and an underground sea was created. Water sprang from the hole on the ground and this was Poseidon's gift to the people of Athens (though according to some ancient sources, his gift was a horse). However, the ocean god's gift was seawater, which had little to no use for ancient Athens, a city with access to plenty of rivers and near the sea. As a result, Poseidon's gift was met with limited enthusiasm.



Athena vs. Poseidon

But now, it was Athena's turn. The goddess kneeled and planted something on the ground. Everyone held their breath. Within moments, a fully grown tree rose from the earth. This was Athena's gift: an olive tree. The tree was a high-quality timber source, while its fruit was nutritional and could be used to make olive oil, which had multiple applications.



Athena vs. Poseidon

Athena's gift was superior beyond doubt. Without hesitation, Cecrops proclaimed Athena the winner of the competition, and the goddess of wisdom gave her name to the city, hence called Athens.

Instead of accepting his defeat with dignity, Poseidon proved to be a sore loser. According to Apollodorus, "Poseidon in hot anger flooded the Thriasian plain and laid Attika under the sea".

This was the end of the name-giving of Athens, one of the city's founding myths.



Athena vs. Poseidon



Athena vs. Poseidon



Athena vs. Poseidon: the Erechtheion

An ancient Greek Ionic temple on the north side of the Athenian Acropolis. It is a sanctuary for Poseidon Erechtheus.

The joint cult of Athena and Poseidon-Erechtheus appears to have been established on the Acropolis at a very early period, and they were even worshipped in the same temple as may, according to the traditional view, be inferred from two passages in Homer and also from later Greek texts (Hom. II. 7.80-81, Od. 2.546-551).



Athena vs. Poseidon: the Erechtheion

On the south wall of the western naos was an L-shaped staircase which leads to the higher Porch of the Maidens (or Caryatid Porch, or Korai Porch), a prostyle tetrastyle porch, or pteron, having six sculpted female figures as supports, all facing south and standing on a low wall. The only entrance to the Porch of the Maidens was the stairway from the interior of the naos.



Caryatids: The Daughters of Athens



The Lost Sister



The Lost Sister





London



Athens

[Link 1](#)
[Link 2](#) (acropolis: 4:30)



Demeter: Female Power

- All recreative or reproductive phenomena were associated with female deities:
 - Gaia – the earth
 - Demeter – fertility of the soil and cycle of life
 - Aphrodite – human desire and sexuality
 - Artemis – liminal transition of girls from maidenhood to wife and mother
 - Hera – the sacred structure of the family
- In other parts of the ancient Mediterranean scholars have recognized the cross-cultural figure of the Mother-Goddess (or, Great Goddess, Great Mother); in Greece she is Demeter



Demeter and Persephone

- Demeter: 'de' is unknown; 'meter', mother
- Persephone: no known meaning
- Persephone is often referred to as Kore, 'daughter', 'maiden'; she is a Parthenos, an unmarried virgin, forever
- The mother and daughter were often referred to as The Two Goddesses, in a way representing two aspects of the same figure or idea: Persephone, the Parthenos, is eternally fertile, and Demeter provides the seeds
- The Homeric Hymn to Demeter tells the central myth related to her, the abduction of Persephone by Hades and the establishment of the Eleusinian Mysteries to Demeter and Kore

Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Persephone's abduction

The girl was playing one day, she and the daughters of Oceanus,
far from gold-sickled Demeter, ripener of bountiful harvests.

In a soft grassy meadow she gathered roses, violets ...
a glorious narcissus, which the Earth had sent up as a favor to him
who swallows whole armies, in accord with the counsels of Zeus, a
lure to the blossoming maiden. ...

At once the wide-spreading earth split apart in the Nysian plain.
Out rode the swallower of hosts, drawn by his deathless horses—
her uncle, Cronus' son, he who holds rule over many,
he who is known by a myriad of names. He hustled her, screaming,
Into his car, and carried her off, disregarding the protests
that she cried aloud to her father, Zeus, who is highest of gods.
But nobody, mortal or god, gave ear to her shouts for assistance.





- Only Hecaté heard Persephone's cries
- Zeus allowed Hades to abduct Persephone, and arranged to be away attending supplicants, thus assuming the appearance of blamelessness

Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Grief of the Mother

Pain seized Demeter's heart. Her hands tore the dark purple veil off her ambrosial hair, and she wrapped a dark garment of mourning over her shoulders, ...

Nobody, mortal or god, was willing to say what had happened. No bird approached her, reporting reliable news of her daughter.

For nine whole days mighty Deo wandered the face of the earth...

Hecatê came down to meet her, with a shining torch in each hand, ... "I heard her voice, yes, but I could not see for myself just who it was."

Together they go to Helios who sees all to demand answers:

"Zeus, the driver of clouds, alone must be held to account, who gave the maid to his brother, Hades, as blooming young bride. Hades is her abductor."

Demeter, Athenian red-figure krater c. 5th cen BCE,
Badisches Landesmuseum



Homeric Hymn to Demeter: At the Palace of Celeus

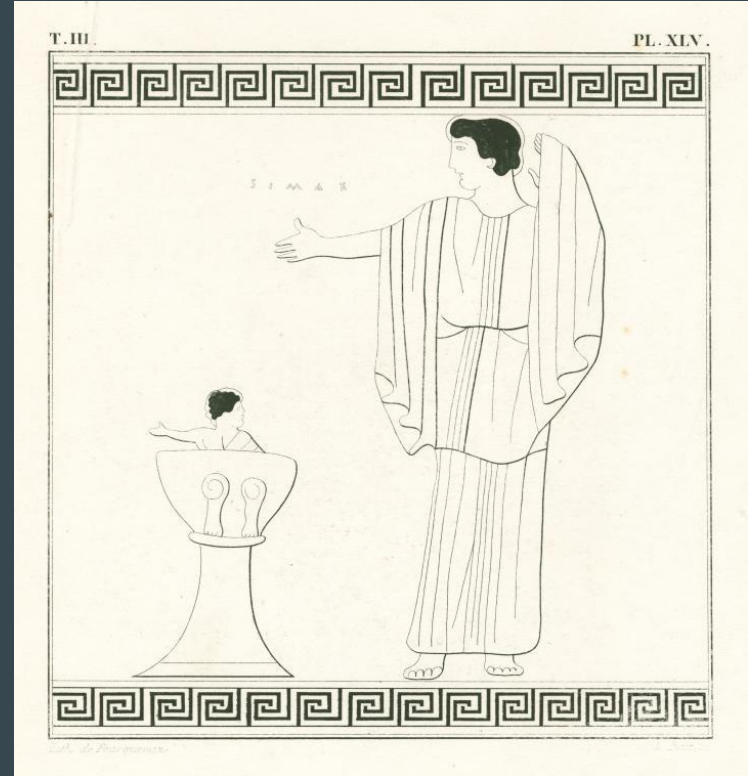
- Mad with grief, Demeter disguises herself as a woman and walks among mortals; she sits down to rest at the Well of the Maidens, where she is approached by the daughters of King Celeus, who have come to fetch water
- Celeus, king of Eleusis – a town about 14 miles west of Athens
- The daughters invite her to the palace since their mother needs a nanny for their young brother
- Offered hospitality, Demeter refuses wine, but accepts a drink called kykeion (barley water with pennyroyal); Queen Metaneira is impressed with the 'woman' and gives her employment





Homeric Hymn to Demeter: At the Palace of Celeus

- Demeter anoints the baby Demophoön every evening with ambrosia, and puts the baby in the fire of the hearth to burn away its mortality
- But one evening Metaneira spies on Demeter and interrupts the rite. Demeter drops the child in surprise, resumes her divine form, and rebukes Metaneira for interfering with divine secrets which would have made the baby immortal. But Demeter does promise to teach her sacred rituals to the Eleusinians



Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Reconciliations

“fair-haired Demeter, far from the rest of the blessed she stayed, though withering away with longing and grief for her daughter ... She sent men a terrible year, a plague for the earth and its harvest. ... Demeter might well have destroyed the whole of humankind by famine, and robbed the gods on Olympus of the honor of proper offerings, had Zeus not considered the matter and pondered it well in his heart.”

- Zeus sends messengers to bring Demeter to speak to him: she refuses to see anyone until she sees Persephone, and one by one rejects all the gods and the gifts they offer her;
- At last, Zeus sends Hermes to persuade Hades to give Persephone up
- Hades agrees, and permits Persephone to depart, still considering her his bride:
“But Hades, peering about to be sure that no one was watching, casually gave her a seedlet of a luscious and sweet pomegranate to eat, thus making it certain she could not remain forever by the side of dark-robed Demeter”

Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Reconciliations

“Daughter, when down below, I hope that you tasted no morsel? ... If you have, back you must go to the depths, to spend a third part of the year. The rest you may stay here with me and with the other immortals. For when earth blossoms again with fragrant flowers of springtime, once more you will rise, a wonder to the gods and the race of mankind.”

Zeus sends Rhea to summon Demeter, and this time she obeys. This is the deal they strike:

”Demeter consented to this: Her daughter hereafter would spend a third of each circling year below, in the wind-smitten darkness, but the rest of the time with her mother and all the other immortals. “

Homeric Hymn to Demeter: Establishment of Cult at Eleusis

“Demeter herself explained the rites of her cult to the kings, the givers of justice— Triptolemus, Diocles, lasher of horses, mighty Eumolpus as well, and Celeus, ruler of people. To them she revealed the observance and carrying-out of her rites, things which are reverend, holy, which no one must ever describe, into which no one may inquire, which no one may ever reveal. Blessed the man who in life has viewed the mysteries’ ritual. But the uninitiated many, who have no part in their teaching, will have no snare in a future like this when they pass below, ...



The myth: interpretations

Option #1: The Agricultural Allegory

The Greeks were to a large extent 'ruled' by the seasons; they relied on agriculture. Therefore, it has been suggested that in ancient times the abduction myth was an allegory for agriculture: this approach views Hades as the earth and Persephone as the grain planted inside it; her return to earth corresponds to the growth of new wheat.

Option #1: The Agricultural Allegory

This interpretation does not match the facts of Greek agriculture:

The hymn explicitly says Persephone returns on the first day of spring; but in Greece seeds were planted in autumn and grow through winter.

It does not sprout in the spring at all!

The myth: interpretations

Option #2: The Maturity Allegory

Persephone is the Eternal Parthenos, and in many ways the hymn is a very human story about a mother and daughter; Persephone's fate is that of every Greek girl who at the age of about 14 had to be married to a man much her senior, whom she did not know at all – and be separated from her home and mother. The sudden loss of virginity is like the death of childhood; marriage was also a literal death for many women, who died in childbirth



Demeter and Persephone

British Museum, London

The myth: interpretations

Option #2: The Maturity Allegory

Yet unlike Greek maidens, Persephone is a liminal figure, she exists in two worlds, yet belongs to neither; she is forever the bride, never a mother; Girls who died before marriage were called 'Hades' Brides'

The pomegranate seed symbolizes her sexual union with Hades; but the seeds never bear fruit, instead, they trap her in/with Hades

Hades and Persephone in the underworld, interior of a red-figure cup, Greek, from Vulci, c. 430 bce; in the British Museum.

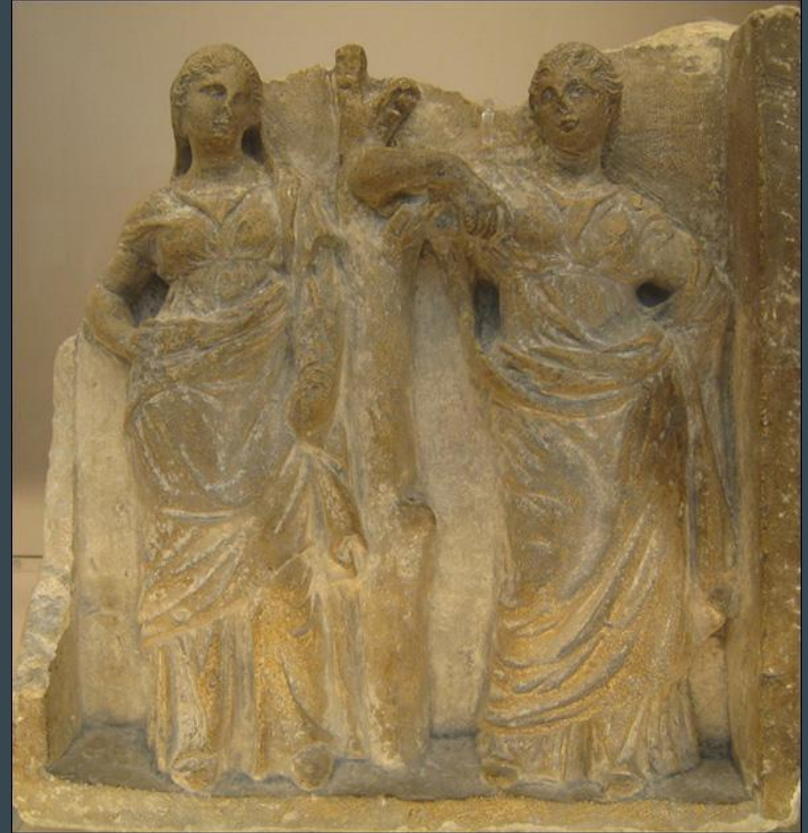


The myth: interpretations

Option #2: The Maturity Allegory

Demeter's experience is closer to reality in the sense that it does mimic the experience of a mother who had to suffer the separation from her daughter– or any child who dies of disease, war, etc. (Christianity: Mater Dolorosa)

Yet it was Persephone's sexual curiosity – she reached for the flowers – that separated her from her mother



Demeter and Persephone

British Museum, London

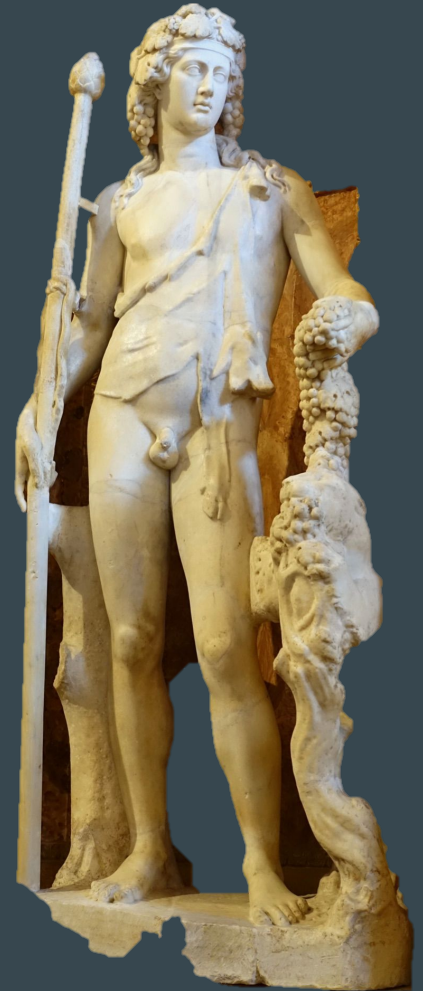






Dionysus

- Wine, fertility, ecstasy, divine madness (loss of self)
- Grapes, Ivy, Panthers; Leopard skin; Phalloi
- Late arrival to Olympus: replaced Hestia
- Followers: Satyrs (males), Maenads (females)
- Sources:
 - Two Homeric Hymns to Dionysus
 - Apollodorus, *The Library* (of Greek Mythology)
 - Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
 - Euripides, *Bacchae* (406 BCE)





Birth of Dionysus

- Semele, princess of Thebes
- Zeus desired her
- Hera comes to Semele
- Zeus' true form; Hermes
- "Twice-born god"
- Ino, disguises the baby
- Athamas and Ino; Hera again
- Nymphs of Nysa
- Mad Dionysus: Egypt, Syria, Phrygia
- Cybelê (cure; long robes)
- Bacchae/bacchantes/maenads
- Midas
- Pactolus River (invention of coins in Lydia, 6th cen. BCE)





Tyrrhenian Pirates (Hom. Hymn to Dion.)



Ariadnê

- Ariadne- daughter of king Minos
- Dionysus finds her deserted on an island, having been abandoned there by Theseus
- He takes her into his cult and marries her



Resistance to Dionysus

- In Thrace
 - Lycurgus
 - Madness; killed by his people
 - Homer, Iliad 6.130-40
- In Orchomenus
 - King Minyas
 - Minyads
 - Bats
- Thebes
 - Eur. Bacchae
 - Pentheus



Euripides' *Bacchae*

- Vengeance on Agave, Autonoe, & Ino
 - Sisters of Semele
- Mount Cithaeron
- Pentheus
 - Cadmus and Agave
 - 'man who suffers'
 - OR: Pantheos, 'all the gods'



Euripides' *Bacchae*

- Dionysus returns to Thebes to avenge his mother, who was disrespected by her sisters who did not believe her about Zeus; one of them is Agave, Pentheus' mother
- He brings with him his maenads from Asia and his travels, and the play begins when he has already entrapped the Theban women in the mad Bacchic frenzy



Euripides' *Bacchae*

- Pentheus king of Thebes is not convinced and rejects the worship of Dionysus, despite being warned not to do so by Cadmus and Teiresias
- Dionysus disguises as a priest to convince Pentheus to worship the new god. Pentheus mocks him and imprisons him, cuts away his sacred hair and takes his staff



Euripides' *Bacchae*

- Imprisoned in the palace, Dionysus combats Pentheus at first, whose strikes always miss; he then makes an earthquake bring the palace down and meets Pentheus again outside the palace, unharmed
- Mocks Pentheus for fighting shadows, and offers him instead to go with him to Mount Cithaeron to see the maenads



Euripides' *Bacchae*

- Pentheus is excited to see them, and Dionysus convinces him that instead of charging the women – who have already torn apart a farmer who tried to stop them – they should do some recon first
- In order not to frighten the women, Dionysus convinces Pentheus to wear women's robes. Pentheus is ashamed at first but then agrees



Euripides' *Bacchae*

- Upon wearing the garments, Pentheus suddenly rejoices in them: “How do I look in my getup? Don’t I move like Ino? Or like my mother Agave?”
“So much alike. But look: one of your curls has come loose from under the band where I tucked it.”
“It must have worked loose when I was dancing for joy and tossing my head.”
“then let me assist you now and tuck it back. Hold still.”
“Arrange it. I am in your hands completely.”



Euripides' *Bacchae* 1112-29

Then everything became one
screaming clamor, the poor man
groaning while his breath remained,
the women screaming in triumph.
One waved an arm, one waved a
foot, whose boot hung by one lace.
His ribs were stripped of flesh by
grasping claws. Each bloodied hand
played a man game of ball with
Pentheus' flesh.



Euripides' *Bacchae* 1112-29

His mangled body lay, scattered and torn, part on the jagged flints, part in the bushes, a gruesome task to gather up to bury. His wretched head fell to Agavê's hands. She waved it proudly, on her thyrsus' point, believing it a mountain lion's head. Leaving her sisters with the maenad crew, she marched, exulting, from Cithaeron's height, down to the city walls, hailing the Bacchic god as "fellow hunter", "comrade in the chase", and "glorious in victory".



Cult of Dionysus

- *Orgia*
 - “Secret rites”
- *Enthousiasmos*
 - “Being filled with the god”
- *Ekstasis*
 - “Standing outside oneself”
- *Lysios*
 - “Deliverer”
- *Sparagmos*
 - “Tearing apart”
- *Omophagia*
 - “Eating of raw flesh”
- Hints of cannibalism?



Further Associations

- Theater
 - City Dionysia
 - Thespis
 - Masks
- Delphi
 - Hyperboreans
 - Nietzsche
 - “Birth of Tragedy”
 - Apollonian/Dionysian Dichotomy

Why a foreign god?

- Appears on Linear B tablets
- Folktale motifs in Dionysic myths
- God of fertility (*dendritēs*, “he of the trees”; associated with figs, as well as the pine); Demeter: the grain, Dionysus: the juice
- On Olympus, often called either “destroyed of men” OR “bringer of many joys”
- To the rational, conscious mind, Dionysus is the antithesis of all that is good and right
- To the Greeks, he seems foreign, strange
- The persistent portrayals of Dionysus as a new god as well as the unique myths about the resistance he has encountered reflect the Greeks’ aversion to the violent, irrational side of human existence





Heroes: Gilgamesh

- Heroes
 - Modern heroes: soldiers, firefighters
 - Anyone who stands out, distinguished by bravery or merit
- For the Greeks
 - “hero” – *heros*, probably meant ‘protector’
 - Homer: any noble or well-born male, all alive
 - After Homer: refers to dead warriors, noble figures from the distant past
 - Homeric Heroes thought to be powers dwelling under the earth and received their own worship cult

Hero Cult

- Heroes were worshiped in places called heroa (sg. heroön)
- There were often tombs, enormous earthen mounds heaped up to protect and monumentalize the grave of the hero
- There are heroa attributed to Pelops at Olympia, Achilles at Troy, Aeneas near Rome
- These mounds were deliberately built in conspicuous locations, with sanctuaries, common roads or maritime routes, to secure everlasting renown for the dead hero



In the early 5th century BCE, the Athenian Cimon brought “home” from the island Scyros the protective bones of a giant skeleton they believed to be their legendary Theseus; Alexander the Great, after his first victory over Persians in 334 BCE, made a pilgrimage to Troy and ran naked around Achilles’ grave three times

Heroes around the ancient world

- Few civilizations produced heroes in the Greek sense
- There are none in the myths of ancient Egypt, and barely any in the Bible, except Samson and perhaps King David; even the Romans did not have heroes of their own
- The ancient Mesopotamians had one legendary hero, Gilgamesh, one of the oldest cycle of stories in the world(!)
- The so-called Epic of Gilgamesh that has come down to us was never an oral epic like Homer's and Hesiod's works, but a scribal exercise created in writing
- Nonetheless, many elements in the Gilgamesh epics are parallel to Greek myths
- The Greek stories must depend to an extent on an oral transmission of the Mesopotamian legends

Gilgamesh

- Gilgamesh was a real man who ruled the Sumerian city of Uruk
- According to king lists inscribed in cuneiform writing on clay tablets, he lived for 126 years sometime about 2600 BCE
- He is best remembered for building the city walls of Uruk
- Fragments telling of his life and deeds survive recorded in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hittite, and other languages and scripts
- On twelve tablets from the library of Assurbanipal in Nineveh, destroyed in 612 CE, survives something close to a connected tale, a version of the story that contains elements **older by a thousand years than Homer**
- The story was divided into many episodes that a scribe named Sin-lege-unnini (he signed!) pieced together to form



Part of tablet V

Gilgamesh

- The poem begins with a summary of Gilgamesh's career

The man who saw everything to the ends of the earth,
who experienced everything, considered all!
He was what was hidden, he disclosed the undisclosed.
He brought back a story of times before the flood.
He went on a long journey. He was wearied, he rested.
Everything he did he engraved on a monument made of stone.

- Compare to the first lines of Homer's Odyssey:

Sing to me, O Muse, of the wily man, who wandered far
After he had sacked the holy city of Troy. Many were the men
whose cities he saw, and he learned their mind, and many
the hurts he felt in his heart upon the sea, trying to win
his own life and the return of his comrades.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu

- Described as 2/3 divine and 1/3 mortal, Gilgamesh was destined to die
- King of Uruk, he was proud and abused his power
- He slept with every virgin before her wedding night, and at last the people of Uruk begged the gods to be released from the burden of Gilgamesh
- Aruru, mother of the gods, heard them and created a rival for Gilgamesh out of clay she pinched off the earth: that was Enkidu, who wore his hair like a woman
- Enkidu was a primitive man, his body covered with hair, he lived in the wild, ran with gazelles, ate grass and drank from water holes
- One day a hunter saw Enkidu and reported to Gilgamesh that a wild man is ruining his traps and releasing his game



Mace dedicated to Gilgamesh, with transcription of the name Gilgamesh in standard Sumero-Akkadian cuneiform, Ur III period, between 2112 and 2004 BCE

Gilgamesh and Enkidu

- But Gilgamesh recognized Enkidu from a dream:
Gilgamesh says to him, the trapper:
‘Go, my trapper, and take a whore with you.
When he [Enkidu] comes with his beasts to the water hole,
She will pull off her clothing and lay bare her nipples.
When he sees her, he will approach her.
Then will his beasts, raised on the plains, reject him!’
- The trapper and the whore waited for Enkidu for two days; on the third, he arrived, and the woman bared her breasts. Enkidu made love to her for six days and seven nights. Afterward, he went back to the wild, but he was changed. He returned to the river and sat with the whore.



Gilgamesh and Enkidu

- The woman explained to him that he was like a god and that he should follow her and learn the ways of man: from the shepherds, he learned to eat bread, drink wine, and wear clothes.
- Then, a report came from the city, stating that Gilgamesh would deflower another virgin –tonight! Enkidu declared he would challenge the tyrant.
- As Enkidu entered the city, all admired his strength and compared him to Gilgamesh. The two mighty men wrestled. The rivals were filled with mutual respect and admiration and embraced one another warmly. This began their lifelong friendship – the theme of the male companion is important in Greek myths, too.

Gilgamesh and Humbaba

- Gilgamesh asked Enkidu to accompany him to the Land of the Living, also called Land of the Cedars, ruled by the sun-god Shamash.
- Enkidu was hesitant because he had been there before and feared Humbaba, the guardian of the forest.
- Gilgamesh said even if they died there, at least their names would be known forever. [Greek: kleos, eternal glory]
- The heroes prepared for the journey. They crossed seven mountains until they came to the edge of the cedar forest. Enkidu was paralyzed with fear, but Gilgamesh helped him overcome it. They entered the forest and traveled far.

Gilgamesh and Humbaba

- Then they shared an ominous dream, for Humbaba knew they were there.

Then Gilgamesh took up his ax and chopped at the forest.
When Humbaba heard the noise,
he was angered. “Who has come,
who has injured the trees
that grow on my mountain?
Who has felled the cedar?”



- Shamash urged Gilgamesh to attack Humbaba, but suddenly, Gilgamesh fell asleep and fell to the ground as if dead. When he came to, he stood up and took up his weapons. Humbaba begged for his life; Gilgamesh struck Humbaba, with the help of Enkidu. They offered Humbaba's head to Enlil, the storm god, but Enlil was furious they had killed the forest's guardian.
- The motif of the broken taboo and divine retribution is also prominent in Greek myths.

Gilgamesh and Ishtar

- When they arrived back in Uruk, Gilgamesh washed and combed his hair. The goddess Ishtar (Sumerian: Inanna) saw how handsome he was. She promised to give him rich rewards if he planted his seed in her. Gilgamesh rejected her in one of the most famous passages of Mesopotamian literature:
‘You are a charcoal grill that goes out in the cold! You are a back door that lets in the squall and the storm, a fortress that smashes down the brave, pitch that fouls its bearers, a siege engine that wrecks the enemy’s land, a shoe that pinches its owner’s foot! Which lover did you love forever? Which of your shepherds pleases you for all time? Listen, I will name your lovers: To Tammuz, lover of your youth, you have given moaning year in, year out. You loved the spotted shepherd-bird, then struck him, breaking his wing. Now he sits in the woods crying, Oh, my wing! You loved a lion, the perfection of power; twice seven pits you dug for him. Then you loved a stallion, a charger in war. What is his lot? The whip, the spur, and the lash!’

Gilgamesh and Ishtar

- Male hostility toward the treacherous, sexually aggressive female is prominent in this story, a powerful and reoccurring theme in Greek myths, too!
- Ishtar bursts into a fury and storms off to her father, Anu, king of the gods. She demands that Anu sends down the Bull of Heaven to destroy Gilgamesh (like Aphrodite in the Iliad's book 5). If he refuses, she threatens to open the gates of the underworld and unleash the legions of the dead.
- Anu agrees, and Ishtar enters Uruk with the Bull. As the Bull snorts, a chasm opens in the earth, and 100 young men fall in, then 200, then 300. Again, the Bull snorts, a chasm opens, and young men fall in by the hundreds.

Gilgamesh and Ishtar

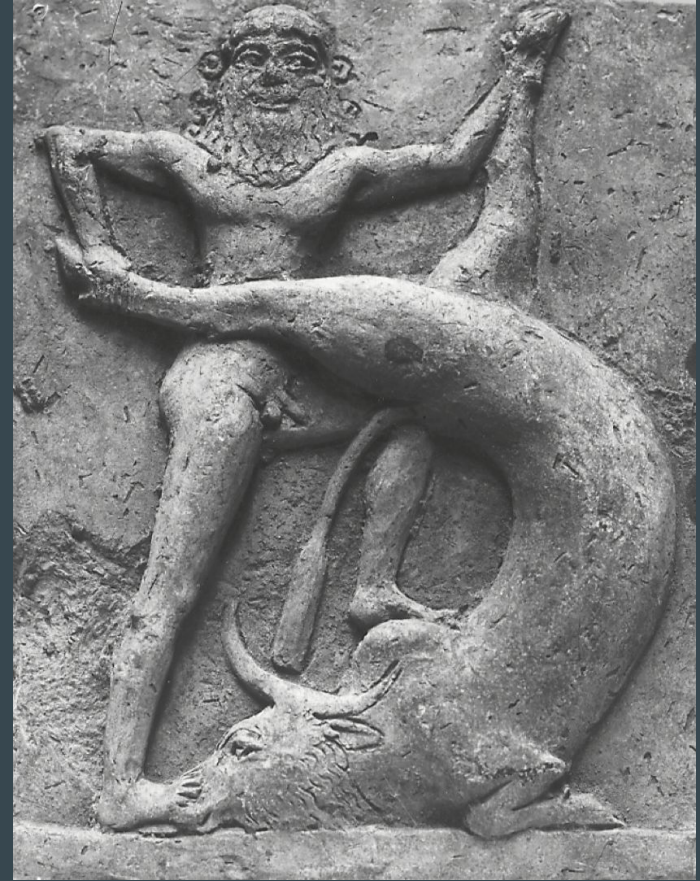
- Gilgamesh and Enkidu battle the Bull and strike it dead. They offer its heart to Shamash.
- Enraged, Ishtar appears on the city's towers. Enkidu cuts off the animal's testicles and throws them in her face.
- The two friends celebrate their victory, but Enkidu's behavior deeply offended the gods. One of the pair, they decide, must die. Enkidu starts having terrible dreams, and he realizes he is about to die. He dreams of going down to a place very much like the Greek Hades:

To the house which is never left, once entered,
on the trail of no return, to the house where the dwellers live in darkness,
where dust and clay is food.

They are clothed like birds, have wings for garments,
And never see the light, dwelling in darkness.

Gilgamesh and Ishtar

- Enkidu falls sick and lies in bed for twelve days before he dies. Gilgamesh mourns by the body, waiting for it to be revived. A maggot crawls out of his nose on the seventh day after Enkidu's passing. That is how Gilgamesh realizes his friend really is dead.
- This theme of grieving a dear companion whose death he is partly responsible for is also seen in Homer's Iliad, with the story of Achilles and Patroclus.



The Quest for Eternal Life

- After Enkidu's death, Gilgamesh fears dying, and he roams the country, fleeing such a fate.
- He decides to search for Utnapishtim – he and his wife were the only mortals to have survived the flood after the gods had transported them to a land beyond the sea where they enjoy everlasting life.
- On his long journey there, Gilgamesh – like Samson and Herakles – killed lions lurking in the mountain passes, and then came to the high mountains of Mashu, where the sun rises. The guardians of this pass are the Scorpion Men, whose glance can kill. Somehow – the tablet is broken – Gilgamesh convinced them to let him pass.



The Quest for Eternal Life

- Gilgamesh enters a dark tunnel, so dark he cannot see what's in front of him. At last, he sees light and emerges into the garden of the gods at the edge of the sea – perhaps the Phoenician coast of the Mediterranean
- In the garden Gilgamesh meets Siduri, the divine beer maiden. She advises him to give up his search and accept his mortality. No one except Shamash, she says, has ever crossed the lethal waters of the sea. In Greek mythology, Odysseus repeatedly meets women on coasts, and they advise and protect him.
- Gilgamesh could not be steered from his quest. Gilgamesh leaves the garden and crosses the water of death with special poles (text is untranslatable here).

The Quest for Eternal Life

- On the other side of the deadly water, Utnapishtim meets him. He says,
No one sees Death,
No one sees the face of Death.
No one hears the voice of Death.
Brutal Death just cuts you down.
We may build a house, we may build a nest:
Our brothers divide it when we die.
There may be hostility in the land,
But then the river rises in the flood.
Dragonflies drift upon the water,
They turn their gaze upon the sun.
From the beginning there has been no permanence.
The sleeping and the dead are the same.
There is no picture of Death.

The Quest for Eternal Life

- Gilgamesh asks Utnapishtim how he escaped death. Utnapishtim tells him the story of the flood – like the biblical Noah – the storm god Enlil helped Utnapishtim and his wife. Who will save Gilgamesh?
- To illustrate Gilgamesh's own mortality, Utnapishtim suggests a trial: Gilgamesh should stay awake for six days and seven nights, the length of the flood. If he cannot battle Sleep, the brother of Death, how will he defeat Death? Gilgamesh thought the trial would be easy, but he did fall asleep and awoke seven nights later. Although Gilgamesh tried to lie about it, Utnapishtim pointed to seven loaves of bread that his wife had baked, and Gilgamesh did not eat.
- There was, however, a way to regain youth: Utnapishtim told Gilgamesh of a plant that grew at the bottom of the sea, whose thorns would revive an old body. Gilgamesh tied stones to his feet, plucked the plant, and came back up. Content, he set back home. On his way, he stopped to wash in a spring. A serpent eats the plant, and that explains why snakes can shed their old skin and grow a new one.

Importance of the Myth

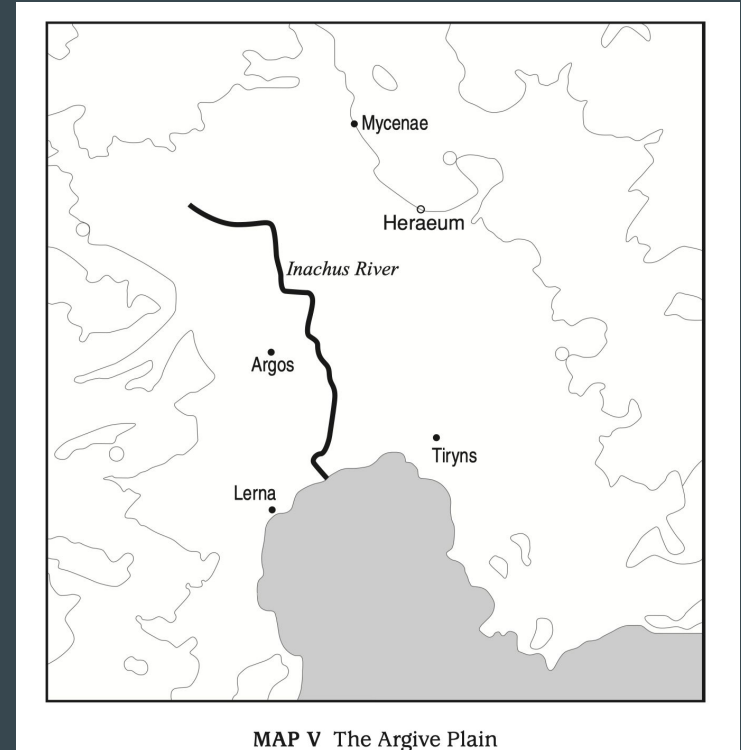
- Gilgamesh realizes he cannot escape his own mortality and, after he weeps, returns home to Uruk. There, he marvels at the city and its walls, his true achievement. He engraves his tale on stone, grows old, and dies.
- This story is the first extant literature that deals with questions of death and truth.
- Western culture received a form of this story in the figure of Odysseus, who gave the West its self-image as restless and inquiring, traveling to foreign lands in search of the meaning of things. But the story is not Western in origin.

Importance of the Myth

- A central theme in the stories of Gilgamesh is the contrast between the natural world and the cultural world of humans. Enkidu is the ‘natural man’ – his hair is long, he runs with animals, he eats grass. After he has intercourse with a woman, he becomes ‘wise’ and is forever separated from the natural world.
- Similarly, Adam and Eve, after eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, see that they are naked – that is, discover their sexuality – and must leave the Garden of Eden – the natural world.
- When Enkidu is dying, he blames the trapper who found him and the woman who seduced and tamed him. Sympathizing with his friend, Gilgamesh puts on animal skins as he departs on his quest. But when the quest fails, he returns to culture and marvels at the city’s walls, the divide between the human and natural world.

Heroes: Perseus

- Like Gilgamesh and Uruk, Greek heroes are also associated with specific sites
- In Greece, no location is as rich with material finds as well as myths as the Bronze Age city of **Mycenae** and the Argive Plain surrounding it
- The only sculptures to survive from the Bronze Age are the two lions on the famous Mycenaean Lion Gate
- Near the citadel, there is a tomb built for a king (Treasury of Atreus)
- In myth, Mycenae was founded by Perseus and later ruled by Atreus and his son, Agamemnon
- Ten miles south of Mycenae stands the smaller-scale **Tiryns**, where Perseus was king before founding Mycenae
- Perseus' grandson, Heracles, lived in Tiryns
- Argos was not important during the Bronze Age, but was the main city in the Argive Plain during the Classical Age and hence the frequent confusion



MAP V The Argive Plain



PAK, CHARLOTTE
© 1980
© 1980





Mycenae

- This is the so-called Treasury of Atreus
- The tomb has little to do with Atreus or with Agamemnon's family, but the name was given by the archaeologist Schliemann, the early excavator of the site, and has remained since
- Explore the tholos [here](#)



Io

- Ancestor of the three great dynasties: the houses of Argos, Thebes, and Crete
- Zeus lusted after Io, who was a priestess of Hera in the Heraeum, the most sacred site to Hera; Zeus surrounded her with mist and made love to her
- Hera noticed the cloud of mist and went to investigate it; at the last minute Zeus turned Io into a cow to hide her from Hera's wrath
- Hera was not deceived; she admired the animal and asked for it as a gift; reluctantly, Zeus agreed, and Hera turned Io into a tree. To keep Zeus away, she placed the monster Argus there to guard Io. Argus had 100 eyes that never shut
- Zeus sent Hermes to free Io; Hermes disguised himself as a shepherd and sang a lullaby that put the monster to sleep, allowing the god to strike. Thus Hermes is called Argeïphontes, Destroyer of Argus. Hera placed Argus' eyes in the tail of the peacock, her favorite animal



Io

- Io was now free, but Hera was not done
- As she was turned back into a cow, Hera sent a gadfly to bother her. Stung constantly, Io found no rest and traveled through Greece to the northwest – hence the Ionian sea around Ithaca, named after Io – and eventually to Macedonia, through Thrace to the Bosphorus (cow-crossing) that divides Europe and Asia
- Io ended up in the Caucasus Mountains; there she found Prometheus, chained to a mountain by Zeus. This encounter is described in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound (430 BCE). They talk; Io tells him her story
- Prometheus predicts that Io has many more wanderings ahead, but eventually she will arrive in Egypt and there, she will regain her human form by the touch of Zeus, that will also impregnate her with Epaphus, 'he who has been touched', the future king of Egypt; her descendant in the 13 generation will set Prometheus free (i.e., Heracles)
- The Greeks identifies their Io with the Egyptian Isis, who is often depicted as a cow
- Io may be identifies with Hera herself, somehow: Homer often refers to Hera as boôpis, 'cow-eyed', and the cow was one of Hera's animals

The Danaïds

- Epaphus married Memphis, eponym of the Egyptian capital of the Old Kingdom at the juncture of the delta and the river, roughly the site of modern Cairo (hence Memphis, Tennessee, that also stands at the juncture of two rivers, the Wolf and Mississippi rivers)
- Memphis and Epaphus had a daughter, Libya, eponym of the country west of the Nile; on Libya, Poseidon had two sons, Agenor, father of Europa, and Belus (Semitic 'lord'); Belus became king of a vast territory on either side of the Nile, married another daughter of Nilus (like Memphis), and had twin sons with her, Aegyptus and Danaüs
- Aegyptus was king of Arabia (i.e. Africa east of the Nile) and Danaüs king of Libya (Africa west of the Nile). Aegyptus named his kingdom after himself: Egypt. By numerous wives, Aegyptus had 50 sons, and Danaüs 50 daughters
- Aegyptus suggested they marry their offspring to one another, but Danaus suspected he wished to gain control over Libya. With Athena's help, he built one of the first ships and fled to Argos, home of his ancestress Io. He became king of Argos; Danaüs is the eponym of the Danaäns

The Danaïds

- The fifty sons of Aegyptus soon followed. This story is the subject of a surviving play by Aeschylus, the Suppliants (this is the first part of a trilogy, but the two following plays are lost); eventually Danaüs agrees to their demands, but he gives each of his daughters a dagger and instructs them to murder their husbands on their wedding night
- Only Hypermnestra spared her husband, Lynceus, because he had spared her virginity (typical folktale motif of ‘all but one’). From this couple descends the later House of Argos
- In the myth, the Danaäns come from Egypt, but history shows that Danaän was the name of an early Greek tribe; by Homer’s day (8th cen. BCE), the name was used interchangeably with Argives and Achaeans for the Greek forces at Troy, whose commander, Agamemnon, ruled Mycenae

Perseus' Birth

- Lynceus ruled Argos after Danaüs dies; his son, Abas, had twin sons, Acrisius and Proetus, who hated each other so much they fought in the womb (like Jacob and Esau in Genesis 25:22, or Isis and Osiris who hated their brother Seth even in the womb); after a long struggle of power, Acrisius took Argos and Proetus, Tiryns.
- Acrisius had a daughter, Danaë, but he wanted a male heir. The oracle told him his daughter will give him a grandson, but that grandson will also kill him. Acrisius decided to imprison his daughter in an underground cage, but Zeus saw her, fell in love with her, and came to her as a shower of gold that fell from the roof into her womb



Perseus' Birth

- And in this way, Perseus (perhaps - 'destroyer') was conceived.
- After a few years, Perseus living with his mother in the chamber, Acrisius heard the baby crying. He wanted to get rid of him, but did not dare to kill the son of Zeus outright. He ordered a wooden box built and placed his daughter and grandson inside, and cast it into the sea.
- Simonides, a lyric poet of the 6th-5th cen. BCE, wrote a poem describing the scene:

She huddled down in the stout-walled box,
which the wind drove on, and the surges tossed.

Terror whitened her tear-stained cheek,
but she clung to Perseus with guardian arms.

"Heaven save us both in this hour of peril,
and you, dear innocent, warm and well-fed, sleep on,
locked in our wooden prison with nails of bronze,
shrouded in darkness, visible, blue-black night.

The crash of the breakers over your head,

the driving waves and the hurrying wind,
mean nothing to you. So snuggle down
in your warm blanket, upon my breast.

My heart would break if you knew that this storm
is a threat to you, if your baby ears
Might understand my terrified words.

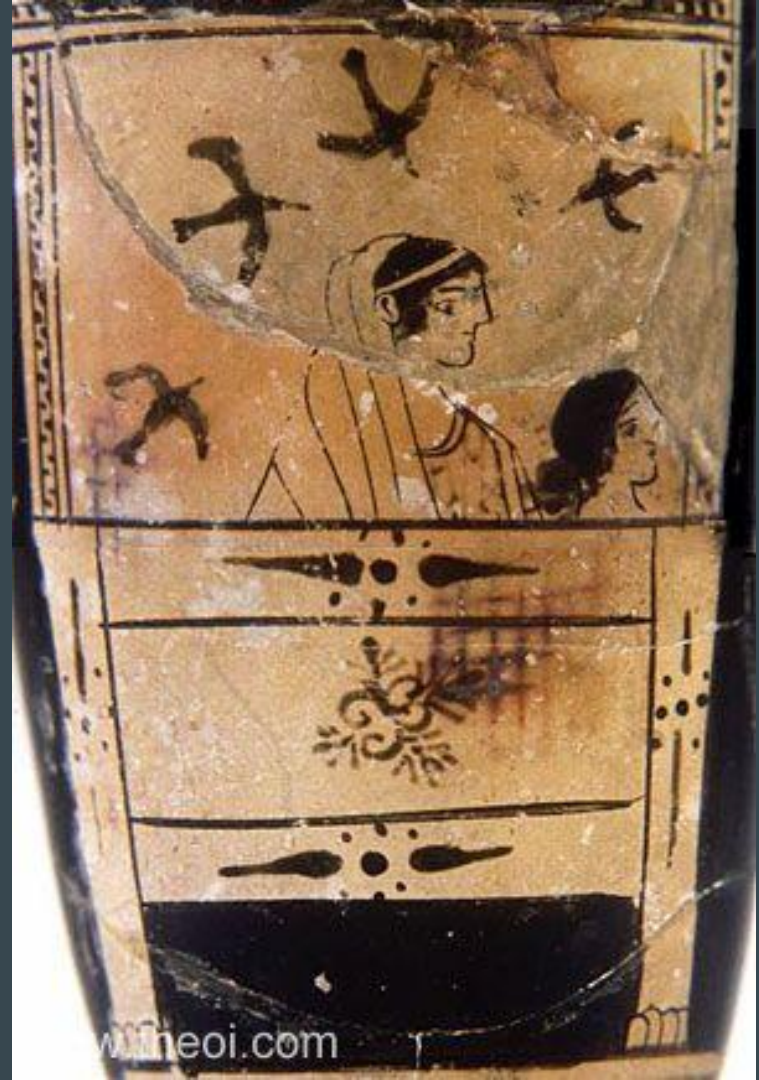
So sleep, my baby, and sleep, you winds,
And sleep, you trouble that knows no end.

O Father Zeus, send a blessed relief! [Fr. 38]

- Danaë and Perseus about to be locked in a box
- Attic vase, c. 490 BCE
- Acrisius, the balding man to the left, oversees a carpenter who is drilling a hole in the box with a box drill
- Danaë stands behind the box
- The nurse to the right holds the infant Perseus
- Two breathing holes have already been drilled in the side of the box
- Boston, MFA



- Danaë and Perseus at sea in the chest
- Athenian red-figure lekythos c. 5th cen. BCE
- Rhode Island School of Design Museum



Perseus

- Instead of drowning, they were saved by a fisherman named Dictys. They come to live with him and Perseus grows into manhood. Then, Dictys' brother Polydectes, king of the poor and bleak island, desired Danaë; but she was unwilling, and Perseus defended her against him. Polydectes then pretended to want another wife, and asked that as a wedding gift, every man must give him one horse. Perseus had no horse to give, but promised to give the king anything else he named, "even a Gorgon's head". The king told him to go get him exactly that, planning on getting rid of Perseus and marry Danae.

Perseus, the Gorgon Slayer

- No one had ever survived an encounter with the three death-dealing Gorgons: Stheno (strength), Euryalē (far-leaper), and Medusa (short for Eurymedousa, wide-ruling). The Gorgons have enormous tasks, staring eyes that turn anyone who sees them into stone; bronze hands, snakes for hair, and golden wings. They live on the edge of the world. Only Medusa was mortal, but still, escaping her sisters would be impossible.
- Athena appears, and gives Perseus exact instructions. He must go to the Gray-Haired Women, the Graea, the Gorgons' sisters, and asked them the whereabouts of certain nymphs. They, two or three in number, were hideous hags who lived near Atlas (the Titan); they had one tooth and one eye between all three, which the passed around to whoever wanted to eat or see.

Perseus, the Gorgon Slayer

- As they passed the eye around, Perseus caught it and demanded to know the location of the nymphs. From the nymphs, Perseus received several objects crucial to his success: the cap of Hades, winged sandals, and a pouch to store Medusa's head in. From Hermes, Perseus received a steel sword and a shield of polished bronze.
- Perseus flew to the river Ocean (where Odysseus summoned the shades). There the Gorgons slept. Because looking directly at them meant death, Perseus snuck past Stheno and Euryale, using his polished bronze shield and a mirror, and slashed off Medusa's head. But Medusa was pregnant by Poseidon, and as the head came free, and out sprang the winged horse Pegasus (pêgai = springs, of water). Although the sisters tried to pursue Perseus, they could not see him thanks to the cap of Hades.

Perseus, the Gorgon Slayer

- Meanwhile, Polydectes, sure he was done with Perseus, pressed his wooing of Danae with violence. When Perseus arrives back in the island, he finds his mother and Dictys hiding in the altar of the gods. Perseus walked to the palace to announce his return, with Medusa's head. He turned his eyes and pulled the severed head from the pouch. Polydectes and his friends immediately turned to stone. Perseus established Dictys as the king, gave him the magical objects to return to the nymphs, and delivered the head to Athena. Ever after, she wore it on her breastplate or her shield.

- Perseus slays Medusa
- From a relief-decorated amphora from Boeotia, early 7th century BCE
- He turns his face aside to avoid being turned to stone
- Over his shoulder, he carries the scabbard for his sword and the leather pouch
- He wears the cap of Hades and the magical sandals
- Medusa does not yet have the form typical later of a woman with a Gorgon's head, but is represented as a skill-faced woman with a mare's body at the waist
- Mysterious plants frame the scene
- No one has successfully explained the salamander near Medusa's back



- Paris, Musée du Louvre

- Perseus slaying Medusa
- Athenian red-figure pelike, 5th cen. BCE
- NYC, Metropolitan Museum of Art



- Perseus, beheaded Medusa, and Athena
- Athenian red-figure hydria, 5th cen. BCE
- London, The British Museum





- Perseus and Medusa; C. 6th cen. BCE
- Attic Black Figure (White Ground); The J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu



Medusa with the Head of Perseus by Luciano Garbati (2008) A bronze cast version is temporarily displayed in Collect Pond Park, Lower Manhattan.



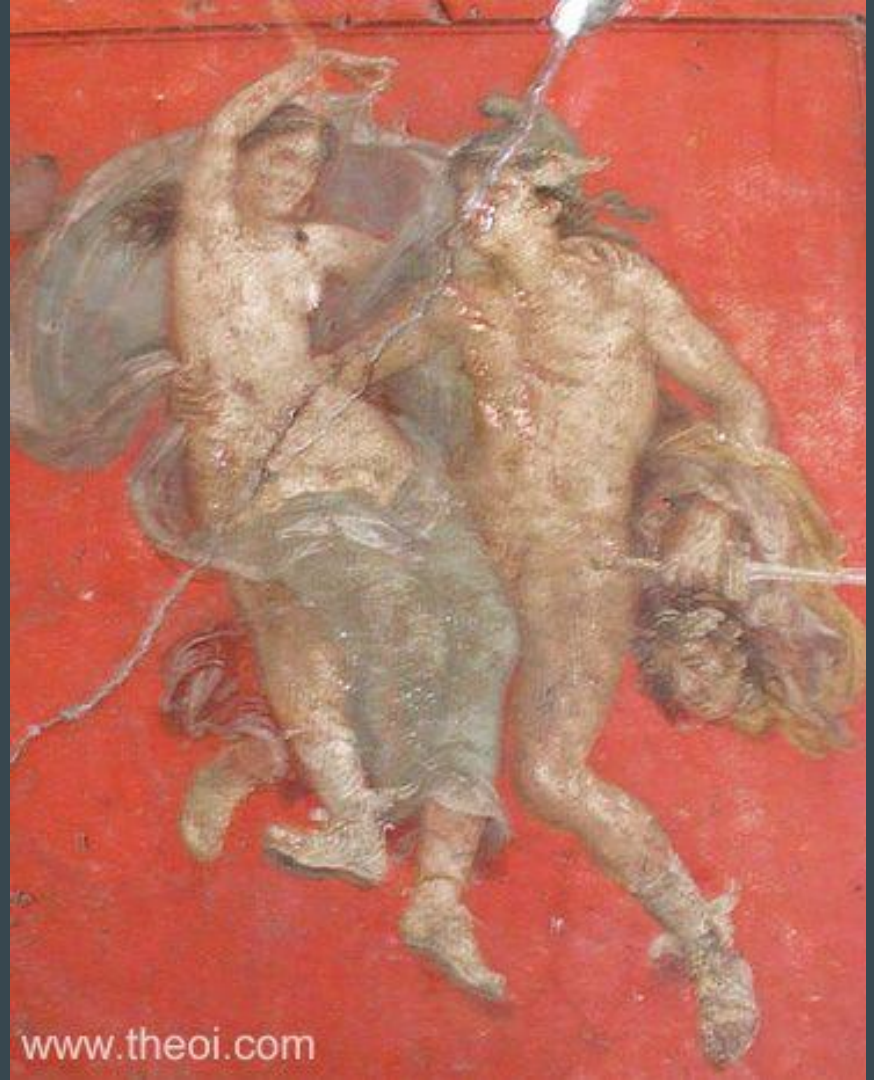
Perseo trionfante by Antonio Canova (1801)
Musei Vaticani, Rome

Perseus & Andromeda

- In a later addition to Perseus' myth, he did not immediately go home after beheading Medusa but flew over Ethiopia OR Joppa (Jaffa) in modern Israel. This land was ruled by Cepheus, another son of Belus and therefore, a relative of Perseus
 - Something is wrong with the genealogy because as a daughter of Cepheus, Andromeda would be four generations older than Perseus
- Looking down, Perseus saw Cepheus' daughter Andromeda. She was chained to a rock facing the sea, about to be devoured by the sea-monster Ceto
- This situation happened because Andromeda's mother Cassiopeä boasted she was more beautiful than the Nereids; the sea-nymphs complained about this insult to Poseidon, who sent a flood and a sea-monster against the land
- The oracle revealed only the sacrifice of the king's daughter will save the kingdom
- Perseus fell in love with Andromeda from first sight. He promised to slay the monster in return for her hand

Perseus & Andromeda

- Perseus and Andromeda
- Greco-Roman fresco from Pompeii
- C. 1st cen. CE
- National Archaeological Museum of Naples



Perseus and Andromeda
Late 1st cen. BCE
Imperial Villa at
Boscotrecase
(Mythology Room)
NYC, Metropolitan
Museum of Art



Perseus & Acrisius

- Remembering the old oracle about his death by his own grandson, Acrisius king of Argos left his palace and fled north, to Thessaly. One day, Perseus, unrecognized, entered an athletic competition in Thessaly. He threw the discus, but the wind suddenly changed and the discus hit Acrisius who was standing in the sidelines. He was instantly killed and Perseus buried him in full honors.
- Perseus did not want to inherit Argos, having killed his own grandfather. So he traded with Megapenthes, the son of Proetus, king of Tiryns. Perseus also founded Mycenea at this time and surrounded it with walls. Perseus and Andromeda lived there for many years
- After their death, Athena placed them among the stars, along with Cepheus, Cassiopea, and Ceto the sea-monster.

Andromeda's Rock



Heracles

- Heracles (Hercules by the Romans) was the greatest of all Greek heroes
- His image and his career are strikingly similar to Gilgamesh, and so he is believed to have migrated to Greece from the east
- Like Gilgamesh, Heracles is strong; he longs for adventures; he understands loyalty and friendship
- Like in Gilgamesh, for Heracles, too, there is a constant tension between the natural world and the world of civilization: Heracles' sympathy with the natural world is symbolized in his chosen weapon, a simple club, and by his choice of bow-and-arrow (in a time where shield and spear were considered modern), and in his often unruly behavior
- However, Heracles also rid the civilized world of many monsters and dangerous men
- Yet at the end of his career, Heracles was bestowed with the unique privilege of living in Olympus among the gods, a fate Gilgamesh only wished for, and Perseus (Heracles' ancestor) never even dreamed of
- No polis claimed Heracles' grave; he is among the earliest mythical figures in Greek art, possibly as early as the 8th century BCE

Heracles

- His famous Twelve Labors were the subject of the sculptural art on the temple of Zeus at Olympia, by the renowned sculptor Phidias, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World
- His story inspired many ancient poets (although only one poem survived)
- There is no one single continuous account of his career but mentions of Heracles and his deeds are so many and occur in so many different authors, writing in different genres, that we can construct somewhat of a biography
- Yet remember that in its comprehensive form, the story of Heracles is a modern reconstruction assembled from many different pieces

Heracles: Birth

- The birth of Heracles is a complex tale, appropriate for a great hero
- Perseus' son, Electryon, married his own niece. They had a daughter, Alcmena, and nine sons
- Electryon had several brothers: Sthenelus had a son, Eurystheus; another brother, Alcaeus, had another son, Amphitryon. Electryon became king of Mycenae, but he was soon attacked by pirates who killed all but one of his sons
- Bent on revenge, Electryon prepared to pursue the pirates. He gave the rulership and the care of his daughter Alcmena to his nephew Amphitryon.
- Before Electryon could leave, Amphitryon killed him and was banished himself
- Amphitryon took Alcmena with him and fled north to Thebes, where the king, Creon, purified him of blood-pollution (miasma)

Heracles: Birth

- Cleansed of murder, Amphitryon married Alcmena, but she refused to lay with him until he completed the task her father took upon himself before he died: to avenge the murder of her brothers
- Amphitryon gathered allies and soon accomplished the task and soon headed home. But meanwhile, Zeus admired Alcmena's beauty and before Amphitryon could return, Zeus took his likeness and appeared at her door. He presented booty, proof of his victory, and they lay together. Zeus took his leave, and soon after the real Amphitryon appeared. Alcmena was confused, but she once again saw the proof by booty, and went with her husband to their bed
- This way, Alcmena received two kinds of seed, divine and mortal, in a single night. From Zeus' seed came Heracles, greatest of all Greek heroes, and from Amphitryon's seed came Iphicles. The affair is told in an epic poem called The Shield of Heracles, attributed in antiquity to Hesiod but now is known to have been composed later, in the 6th cen. BCE, by an unknown oral poet

Heracles: Birth

- Cleansed of murder, Amphitryon married Alcmena, but she refused to lay with him until he completed the task her father took upon himself before he died: to avenge the murder of her brothers
- Amphitryon gathered allies and soon accomplished the task and soon headed home. But meanwhile, Zeus admired Alcmena's beauty and before Amphitryon could return, Zeus took his likeness and appeared at her door. He presented booty, proof of his victory, and they lay together. Zeus took his leave, and soon after the real Amphitryon appeared. Alcmena was confused, but she once again saw the proof by booty, and went with her husband to their bed
- This way, Alcmena received two kinds of seed, divine and mortal, in a single night. From Zeus' seed came Heracles, greatest of all Greek heroes, and from Amphitryon's seed came Iphicles. The affair is told in an epic poem called The Shield of Heracles, attributed in antiquity to Hesiod but now is known to have been composed later, in the 6th cen. BCE, by an unknown oral poet

Heracles: Birth

- Although he will eventually become a god on Olympus, Heracles was not a king. The myth of his birth is decisive for the rest of his career.
- When Alcmena was about to give birth, Zeus prophesied that on that very same day a descendant of his will be born, ruler of the lands of mainland Greece (where at the time civilization was most active and developed). Hera, in a fit of typical jealousy, intervened (this is the crucial part)
- Hera delayed the birth of Heracles and instead hastened the birth of his cousin Eurystheus, although Eurystheus' mother was only seven months pregnant. Eurystheus was the son of Sthenelus, another son of Perseus, therefore still a descendant of Zeus, but one whose blood was more mingled with humans' (Eurystheus was a grandson of Zeus, unlike Heracles who was a full son of Zeus)
- The story is told in Homer's Iliad (19.91-133)

Heracles: Youthful Deeds

- Twins such as Heracles and Iphicles were viewed in antiquity with both superstition and awe
- A way to explain the birth of twins is the belief that they come from two fathers: one divine and one mortal. The mortal-born comes from the woman's consort, but the divine is a child of an invisible being present at the moment of conception
- In Greek mythology, twins tend to be either mortal enemies or the closest friends
- In the legends of Perseus, there are four sets of twins: two were enemies, Danaus and Aegyptus; Acrisius and Proetus, and two were very close, Heracles and Iphicles; Castor and Polydeuces, whom the Romans called Pollux

Heracles: Youthful Deeds

- Amphitryon knew that he was father to only one of the babes, but did not know which was his son and which the son of Zeus
- Only when Hera sent snakes to kill Heracles did Amphitryon learn the truth: one of the infants grabbed the snakes and crushed them in his fist



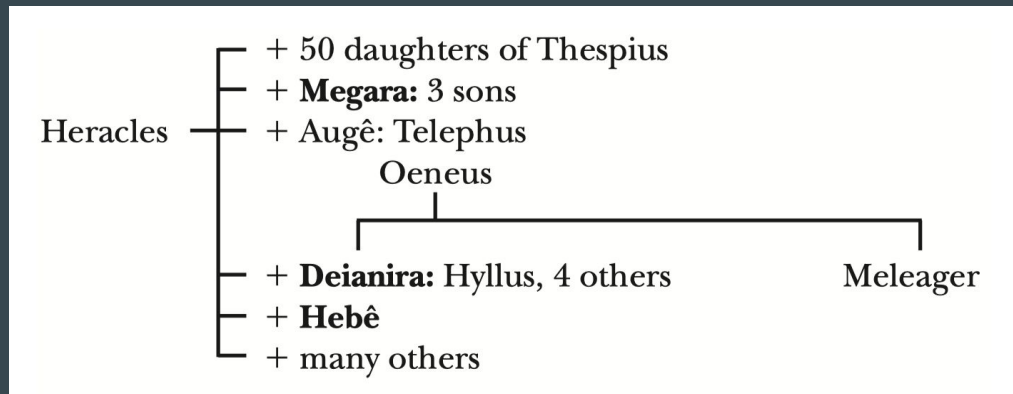
Heracles: Youthful Deeds

- Many of Heracles' youthful deeds are humorous stories
- For example, to ensure Heracles' greatness, Zeus placed the baby at Hera's breast so he could drink the divine milk. Heracles bit Hera's nipple, hard, and she tossed him away, screaming – from the milk of her breast came the Milky Way!
- As Heracles grew up, his education consisted of athletic training but also of learning to play the harp. But his fingers were too big and strong, and he could not master it. Frustrated, Heracles threw the instrument at his teacher's face – and killed him! He stood trial but was acquitted for self-defense!
- When Heracles was 18 years old, he hunted an enormous lion that ate the people's flocks. He hunted the lion for 50 days, and every night, exhausted from stalking the beast, he came to rest at the king's palace, Thespius. The king saw how strong Heracles was and every night he sent one of his daughters to Heracles' bed. But Heracles' thought is was the same woman! And that is how Heracles came to have his first 50 sons

Heracles: Marriage, Madness, and Murder

- The paradox of the hero is best exemplified in the figure of Heracles. While heroes are useful in times of crisis – slaying a lion, for example – in peace-times heroes are often dangerous to the community (as was Gilgamesh) and to themselves.
- Amphitryon, Heracles' step-dad, was killed in a war. The new king of Thebes, Cleon, gave Heracles his daughter Megara in marriage. Heracles settled down with her and had three children,

But soon after, Heracles suddenly went mad. Hera was behind it, and in his madness Heracles murdered his wife and children. (Euripides' *Heracles Insane* (414 BCE?) tells the myth)

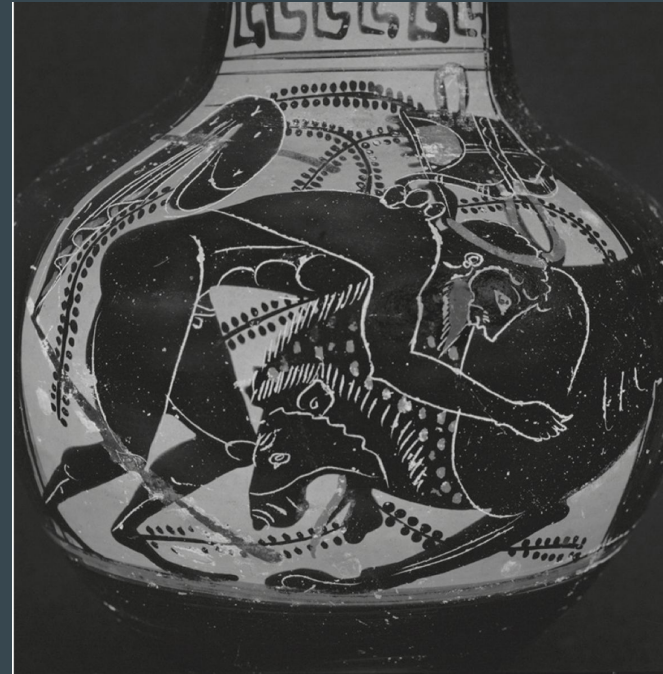


Heracles' Twelve Labors

- Following the murder of his family, Heracles went to Delphi to atone for the crime. The oracle told him that he must leave Thebes and go to the Argive plains, his parents' homeland. There he must serve his cousin Eurystheus, king of Mycenae, and perform Twelve Labors for him.
- The Greek word for Labors is *athloi*, which means 'contests' (athletics comes from it). In the Greek world, victors at contests win prizes; Heracles' prize would be immortality. Several of his trials would be against Death himself!
- Heracles accomplished more than Twelve Labors, and so, ancient commentators divide his deeds into two categories: the *athloi*, and *praxeis*, Deeds, which are various exploits, some military. A third and later category is concerned with Heracles' side-deeds, some of them more important than others.

1: The Nemean Lion

- The first task ordered by Eurystheus was to kill the savage Nemean Lion.
- Heracles took his bow and arrow and fought the lion. He soon realized that his arrows do not harm the lion; his skin was impenetrable.
- Heracles chased the lion, grabbed it by its mane, and using his brute strength snapped the lion's neck.
- When he tried to skin the lion, his weapons still could not break the immortal skin. In a stroke of genius, Heracles used the lion's own claws and with it, cut the pelt.
- Ever after, Heracles wore the lion's skin around his shoulders, and always carried the club he had made in Nemea.



2: The Lernaean Hydra

- The second Labor was to destroy an enormous serpent, the Hydra (lit., water-serpent). The Hydra had many heads and lived in the swamps of Lerna. Even its breath was death.
- Iolaüs, Heracles' nephew, accompanies him. He is the hero's companion, much like Enkidu.
- Heracles fought with the monster and the giant crab. But every time he cut off one head, two more grew in its place; the central head was immortal
- Iolaüs brought fire-brands and they cauterized every stump before it could grow more heads. Heracles cut off the main head and buried it under a rock. The giant crab became the constellation Cancer.
- Heracles cut open the Hydra's body and dipped his arrows in its poisonous bile.



3: The Ceryneian Deer

- Ceryneia is a remote mountain in the northern Peloponnese. The magical beast, although female, had golden antlers and brazen hoofs, and it belonged to Artemis.
- Heracles tracked the deer for a full year until he finally wounded her with an arrow, and carried her to Mycena. On his way over, he met Artemis and Apollo. Apollo forbade him for capturing his sister's animal, but Heracles refused his entreaties. Artemis let him carry the deer to Copreus, the guard to the city, and if he let the deer go afterwards.



4: The Erymanthian Boar

- The boar lived on Mount Erymanthus in Arcadia, in central Peloponnese. Heracles was tasked with capturing it.

Side-Deed: The Friendly Centaur Pholus

- While tracking the boar, Heracles stopped to visit a centaur, named Pholus, in a remote cave. Wanting to be hospitable, Pholus offered Heracles cooked meat (he himself only ate raw meat). Heracles asked for wine to accompany the meal, pointing to a cask, but Pholus explained this wine belonged to all the centaurs and was not his to share. Heracles convinced Pholus there would be no problems and opened the cask; at the scent of liquor, the centaurs around came to the cave with weapons. Heracles fought them and shot his arrows. Among the centaurs was the wise Chiron, who was also immortal. Heracles' poisoned arrow struck him, and so the poison that kills all spread in an undying body – a truly Greek paradox.
- Doomed to endless suffering, Prometheus took pity on Chiron and traded his mortality with him. The fact that Prometheus is mortal is confusing and perhaps it is a typical Greek confusion.
- The other centaurs, among them one named Nessus, scattered.
- After the battle, Pholus picked up one of Heracles' arrows, wondering how one scratch from it could kill a mighty beast like a centaur. He accidentally dropped it, and it grazed his hoof, killing him on the spot.

- Heracles eventually caught the boar and carried it back to Mycenea. Eurystheus, who came to somewhat fear Heracles, hid from him in a bronze jar. Heracles held the boar over the lid to show it to the king.



5: The Augean Stables

- Augeas, son of Helios, was king of Elis. His father had given him many stallions, but Augeas never bothered to clean their stables. The horses lived in feet of dung.
- Eurystheus, wanting to humiliate Heracles, ordered him to clean the stables.
- Without revealing his purpose, Heracles bargained with the king: if he managed to clean the stables in one day, he would receive one-tenth of the cattle.
- Heracles diverted a river through the stables and thus, accomplished the task easily. But when Augeas learned of Heracles' circumstances, he refused to pay. Later, as one of the Deeds, Heracles returns to Elis, kills Augeas and his sons, and instituted the Olympic Games in the name of his father Zeus.

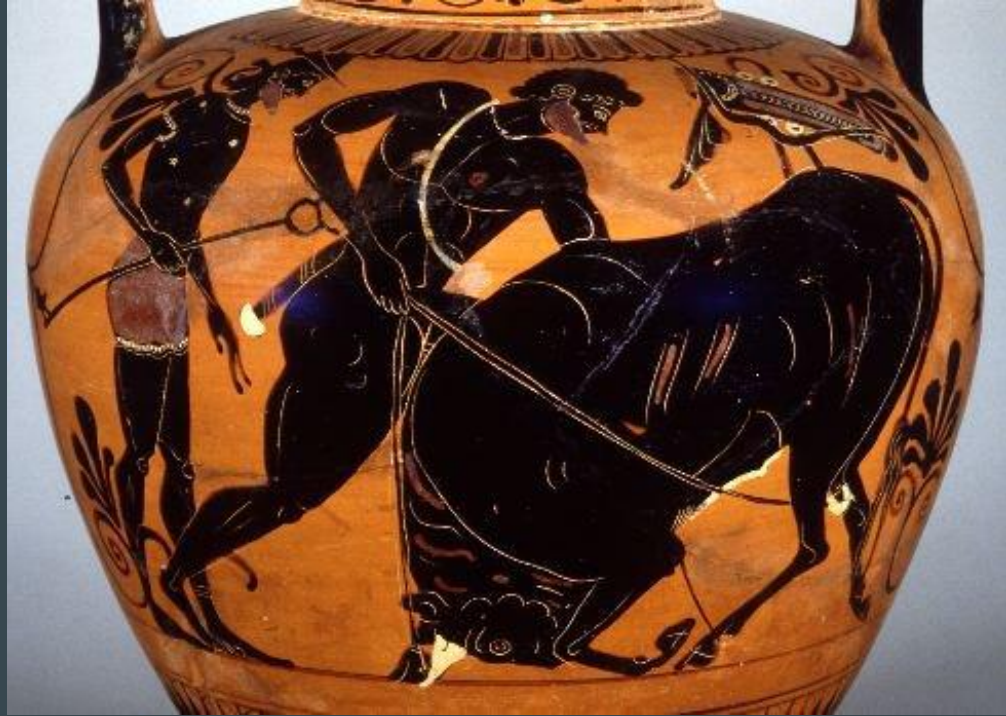
6: The Stymphalian Birds

- In Arcadia around a lake called Stymphalis swarmed mighty flocks of the death-dealing Stymphalian birds, with arrow-firing wings and armor-piercing beaks. Heracles drove them from their cover in the thick forest by clanging bronze castanets. As they flew into the sky, he shot them down with his arrows.



7: The Cretan Bull

- Next, Eurystheus ordered Heracles to capture the Cretan Bull, a magnificent animal summoned from the sea by Minos. Heracles sailed to Crete, seized the bull by the horns, tossed it in the sea, and rode it back to the Peloponnese. After the herald inspected it, the bull got away and wandered Greece until it got to Marathon, where the great Athenian hero Theseus killed it.



8: The Horses of Diomedes

- Next, Heracles was tasked with capturing the horses of Diomedes, a son of Ares and the king of a savage tribe north, in Thrace. There were not ordinary animals, but fed on human flesh.

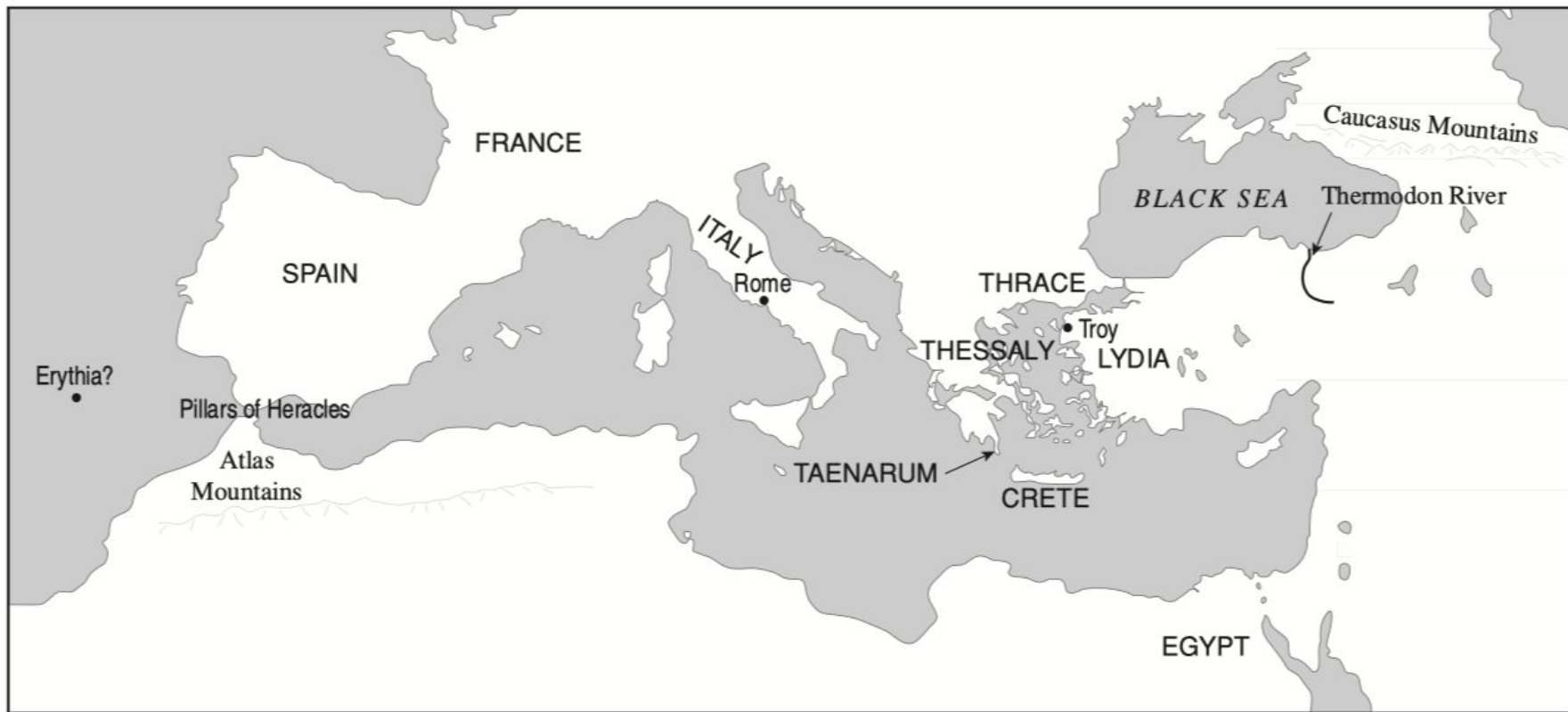
Side-Deed: Alcestis

- Apollo's son Asclepius was the greatest physician. He brought back Theseus' son Hippolytus back from the dead. Zeus was angry as Asclepius' presumption in restoring Hippolytus, and killed him. In revenge, Apollo killed the Cyclopes, who made Zeus' thunderbolts. Zeus struck back by forcing Apollo to serve for a year under Admetus, king over a town in Thessaly. Admetus treated the god so well that Apollo gave him this boon: Admetus need not die, if he could find someone to die in his place. Several, including his parents, refused the honor. Only his wife Alcestis agreed.

8: The Horses of Diomedes

Side-Deed: Alcestis

- While traveling north toward Thrace, Heracles stopped at the house of Admetus. His visit is the subject of one of Euripides' best-known plays, the *Alcestis* (438 BCE). Heracles noticed that the house is in mourning but is not told why, except that a 'neighbor' has died. Seeing no reason to mourn an unknown person so gravely, Heracles enjoys his host's food and wine.
- When he finally learns that the house is mourning the queen, he feels ashamed. He decided to repay by bringing Alcestis back from the dead. He goes (off-stage) to the place where the body awaits its funeral, meets Death (Thanatos), wrestles him down, and brings Alcestis back to the palace.



MAP VII Locations of Heracles' Deeds Abroad

8: The Horses of Diomedes

Side-Deed: Alcestis

- Euripides never fully explains why Alcestis was willing to die for her husband, and he casts Admetus in a silly role, going about and complaining bitterly throughout the play about his fate.
- When Heracles reaches Thrace, he captures the horses, and because they enjoy human flesh, he fed them their master, Diomedes. Then they ran to Mount Olympus where they were eaten by wolves.

9: The Girdle of Hippolyta

- Theseus, Dionysus, and Achilles fought the Amazons; so did Heracles. Eurystheus now ordered Heracles to bring back the girdle of Hippolyta ('horse-tamer'), the Amazon queen, for his daughter.
- The girdle is a belt that women wore above their hips: to loosen it was to offer oneself sexually, and to take it forcibly was rape.
- Heracles gathered some companions and set out on the long journey to the river Thermodon on the southern shore of the Black Sea. When they arrived, Hippolyta offered him her girdle herself.
- Seeing this, the angry Hera disguised herself as an Amazon and ran through the city, proclaiming Heracles abducted the Amazon queen. The amazons attacked, and Heracles, now suspecting Hippolyta, killed the queen, took the girdle, and sailed away.



10: The Cattle of Geryon

- Geryon was a monster who had three bodies joined at the waist. He lived on the island Erythia, 'red land', somewhere in the far west near the river Ocean.
- Geryon owned a wonderful of red cattle, watched over by Eurytion and his demonic two-headed dog, Orthus ('faithful').
- Heracles trudged through the sands of northern Africa, finally reaching the narrows where the Mediterranean Sea opens into the Atlantic Ocean. He set up pillars on either side, today known as the Rock of Ceuta in Tangiers and the Brithis-controlled Rock of Gibraltar. To the ancients they were the Pillars of Heracles, the geographical boundary between the human world and the unknown vastness of outer space.

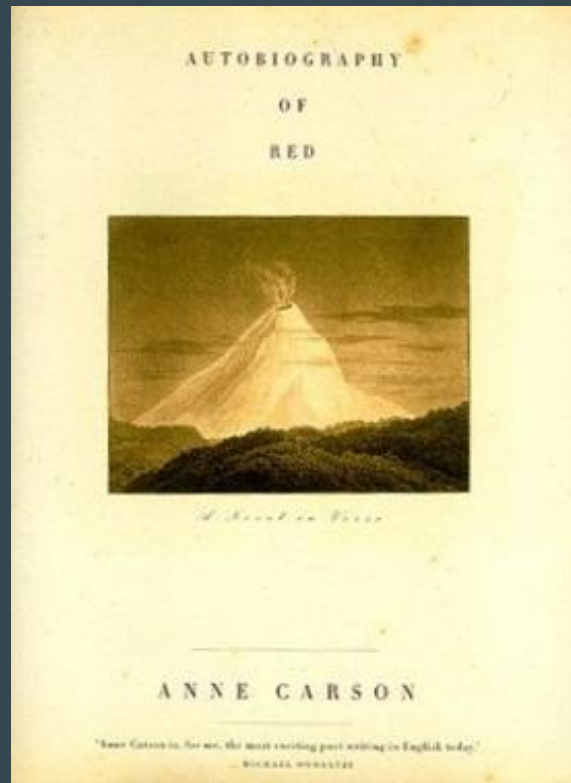
10: The Cattle of Geryon

- As Heracles traveled the African sands, it got so hot that he fired an arrow at Helios, the sun. Helios admired his boldness and lent him a cup in which he traveled.
- The image is taken from Egyptian religion, where the sun-god Ra makes his daily journey in the boat of the sun. with this cup, Heracles crosses the waters to Erythia.
- Heracles landed, bashed in Orthus' head (😞), killed the herdsman Eurytion, and was driving the cattle across the ocean when Geryon attacked. Heracles killed him with his arrows.



Anne Carson, Autobiography of Red (1998)

- Autobiography of Red is the story of a boy named Geryon who, at least in a metaphorical sense, is the Greek monster Geryon. It is unclear how much of the mythological Geryon's connection to the story's Geryon is literal, and how much is metaphorical. Sexually abused by his older brother, his affectionate mother too weak-willed to protect him, the monstrous young boy finds solace in photography and in a romance with a young man named Herakles. Herakles leaves his young lover at the peak of Geryon's infatuation; when Geryon comes across Herakles several years later on a trip to Argentina, Herakles' new Peruvian lover Ancash forms the third point of a love triangle. The novel ends, ambiguously, with Geryon, Ancash, and Herakles stopping outside a bakery near a volcano.
- The book also contains Carson's very loose translation of the Geryoneis fragments, using many anachronisms and taking many liberties, and some discussion of both Stesichorus and the Geryon myth, including a fictional interview with "Stesichoros", a veiled reference to Gertrude Stein.

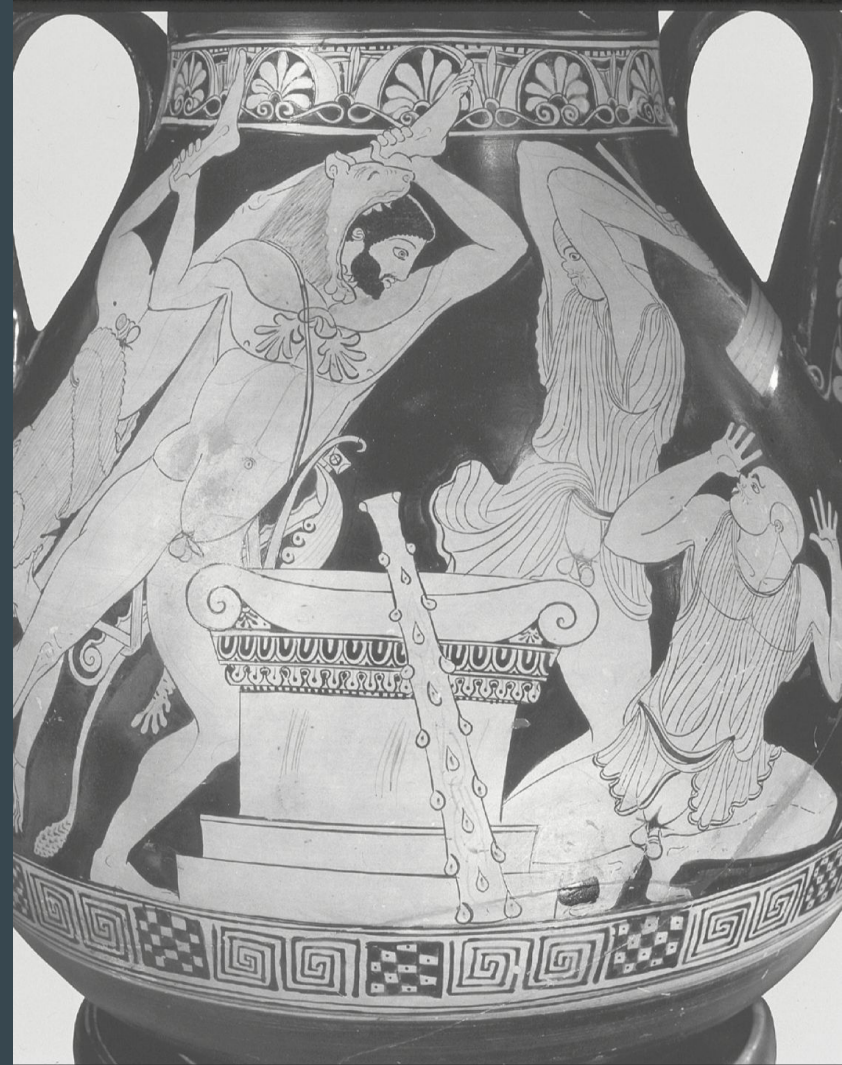


11: The Apples of Hesperides

- Heracles' next task was to bring back the apples of the Hesperides, the nymphs of the West. These apples grew on a magical tree with golden bark and leaves.
- Zeus gave the tree to Hera as a wedding present, and Hera planted it in a garden at the foot of Mount Atlas (hence named the Atlantic Ocean, near the mountain).
- Although the Titan Atlas was said to have become a mountain once Perseus showed him Medusa's head, he was still alive generations later in the days of Heracles.
- Because the Hesperides liked to pilfer from the tree, Hera set a hundred-headed serpent named Ladon to guard over it.
- Heracles did not know where to find them. He had to seize the shapeshifting sea-god Nereus until he gave him their location.

Side-Deed: Busiris

- Although the Hesperides were in the far west, Heracles got confused and traveled east. His next side-deed takes place in Egypt, against Busiris, a son of Poseidon.
- Some years before, when Egypt was barren, a foreign seer told king Busiris that to restore abundance he must sacrifice a foreigner. The king did – starting with the seer himself. Ever thereafter the king sacrificed every foreigner he could.
- Heracles allowed himself to be bound and led to the altar, but he burst out of his bonds, seized Busiris and his sons, and killed them all.
- Busiris is a Greek corruption of the Egyptian Bu-Osiris, meaning ‘the place of Osiris’, the name of the temple dedicated to the Egyptian god of the dead. Heracles’ sacrifice of Busiris, then, is Death overcome.



11: The Apples of Hesperides

- After another side-deed where Heracles met and freed Prometheus, he finally came to the western edge of the world, where Atlas held up the heavens on his shoulders. On the advice of Prometheus, Heracles persuaded Atlas to fetch up the apples from the magical tree. While Atlas was away in the Garden of the Hesperides, Heracles took his place and held up the world.
- The Titan returned but enjoying his freedom, declared he would himself take the apples to Eurystheus. Heracles agreed, but asked Atlas to swap places one last time so Heracles could put a pad on the top of his head to cushion the immense weight.
- Heracles brought the apples to Eurystheus, but because they were too dangerous to keep he returned them to Heracles, who gave them to Athena to put back in the garden.

12: Cerberus

- As his twelfth labor Heracles was ordered to descend to the underworld and bring back its many-headed guard-dog, Cerberus. He traveled to the entrance to Hades at Taenarum. He appeared before the king and queen of the dead and requested to take Cerberus.
- Hades agreed, as long as Heracles did not use any weapons. Protected by his lion's skin, he seized the hound by the throat, although Cerberus' snake-tail kept biting him.
- Heracles passed a chain around the hound's neck and dragged it to Eurystheus, and then released it again to the world below.

Heracles' Death

- While Gilgamesh died peacefully in Uruk, and nothing is known of Perseus' death, Heracles died horribly at the hands of a woman.
- Heracles first heard of Deianira when he was in the underworld. He met the shade of her brother, who suggested that if Heracles made it out of the underworld, he should seek her out and marry her. Heracles accomplished his labors, regained his freedom, and set out to meet her.
- The river-god Acheloüs also wanted Deianira. Appearing as a bull, Heracles wrestled with him and broke off one of his horns. The play *Women of Trachis* by Sophocles (performed c. 430 BCE), which deals with the demise and death of Heracles, gives a description of the fight (503-529).

Heracles' Death

- Taking his bride, Heracles headed for Trachis. The king offered him hospitality, and on the way there Heracles had to cross the river where the centaur Nessus ferried travelers for a small fee. This is the same centaur Heracles had fought long ago.
- Heracles easily swam the length of the river, and Deianira crossed the Nessus' back. Midway through the river, Nessus assaulted her. Heracles shot him with one of his poisoned arrows, and as Nessus died he instructed Deianira to collect his blood and semen, and use them as a potent love potion should she ever need it.



Heracles' Death

- Heracles and his new bride stayed in Trachis, but he still remembered a different girl, Iolë, who was robbed of him by Eurytus. Heracles organized a military campaign, sacked Eurytus' town, took the girl, and retired to prepare a sacrifice to his father Zeus in thanks for the victory. He sent a messenger to Trachis asking for a cloth for the sacrifice. Deianira then remembered the love potion:

“since Nessus died I have kept the venom, safely locked away.

Now I have brought it out, to stain this shirt.

All is made ready, as the living Centaur directed.”

(579-581)

Heracles' Death

- She gives the shirt to the messenger. In the play, it is the son of Heracles and Deianira that tells her what happened next:
“But just as all was ready, his faithful herald came from home, bringing your deadly gift, the envenomed shirt. He put it on, according to your command, ... But then, as the blood-fed fires of the sacred rite blazed up and joined the resinous firewood’s heat, and his whole body broke into sweat, your shirt clung to his ribs, then to every limb. On every bone came cramping, torturing, fire, as the serpentine and deadly venom gnawed. He screamed in pain ... The cries of Heracles re-echoed from the rocks on every side ... At last, exhausted, he collapsed to the ground, cursing and moaning at the bitter wedlock with you, the marriage which poisoned his life.

Heracles' Death

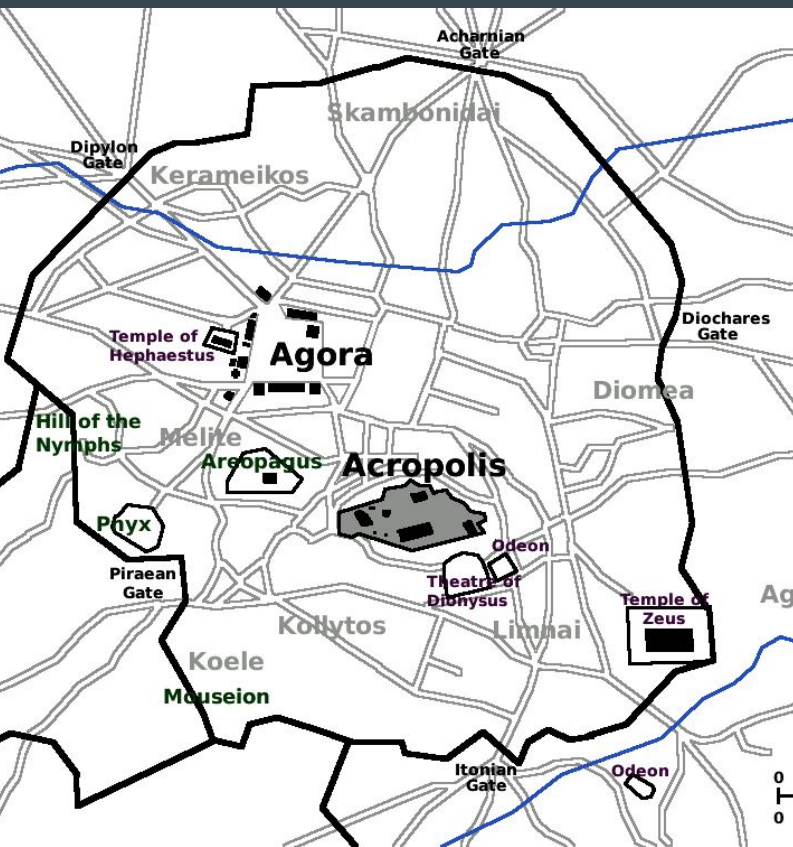
“Come near, my son, don’t run away,
Though it might mean to join me in my death.
Lift me, carry me out, where none can see my pain.
If you have any pity, take me across the water
Far from this place, and let me not die here.”
At this command, we laid him in a ship
And painfully rowed him here in his distress,
Screaming in torment. When you see him next
He may still be alive; more likely, not.

(749-806)

Heracles' Death

- Years before, Zeus warned Heracles that no living man could kill him, but that he would die by the hands of the dead: the bile from the dead Hydra, coursing in the veins of the wounded Nessus, killed him. (the dead-hand motif)
- Seeing what she had done, Deinira stabbed herself.
- Heracles, still suffering, dragged himself to the top of a mountain and built himself an enormous pyre, and lay down in it. No one dared light it for him until a passing shepherd named Philoctetes dared to do it. In gratitude, Heracles gave him his bow – later important in the Trojan War!
- A cloud gathered over the mountain, a thunder struck, and Heracles was lifted from the ground and raised into Heaven.

Athens and Attica



The Origins of Athens

- Age?
 - Bronze Age
 - Attested in Homer
- Cecrops
 - First king of Athens
 - Autochthonous (“Sprung from the earth”)
 - Half-snake (the Giants had snake tails)
- Erichthonius (‘the man of wool and earth’)
 - Athena & Hephaestus
 - The basket and Aglaurus (shining), Herse (dew), Pandrosus (all-dew)
 - Wooden statue of his ‘mother’ Athena on the acropolis
- Arrhephoria
 - “Festival of the dew carriers”



The Origin of Athens



The Origin of Theseus

- Pandion
 - Procne, Philomela, Erechtheus
- Erechtheus
 - Great-grandson Aegeus
 - In his reign, Demeter came to Eleusis
- Aegeus
 - Sterile; Delphi
 - Troezen; King Pittheus
 - Aethra
 - Poseidon
- Theseus
 - To retrieve Aegeus' sandals and sword from beneath a rock



The Labors of Theseus

- Labors of Theseus
 - 1. Periphetes, 'the clubber'
 - 2. Sinis, 'the pine-bender'
 - 3. Sow of Crommyon
 - 4. Sciron (down the slope)
 - 5. Cercyon, a wrestler
 - 6. Procrustes' beds
- Arrival at Athens
- Medea
- Bull of Marathon
- The poisoned cup
- Aegeus' sword
- Pallas' 50 sons



Crete

- Europa
- Minos
 - Pasiphaë
 - Ariadne
 - Phaedra
- Daedalus
 - Icarus
- Minotaur
- Labyrinth



The House of Asterion / Jorge Luis Borges

- [Listen](#) (1:30)

Return to Athens

- Aegeus: Black/White sail
 - “Aegean Sea”
- Amazons/Antiope
- Amazonomachy
 - “War of the Amazons”
- Areopagus
- Lapiths and Centaurs
 - Pirithoüs
- Helen
- Persephone
- Dioscuri twins: Castor and Pollux/Polydeuces
- Scyros: Theseus dies, being thrown off a cliff



Myths of Crete

There is a land called Crete, in the midst
of the wine-dark sea,
Where a countless number of men
inhabit a full ninety cities
Homer, *Odyssey* 19.172-174



Myths of Crete

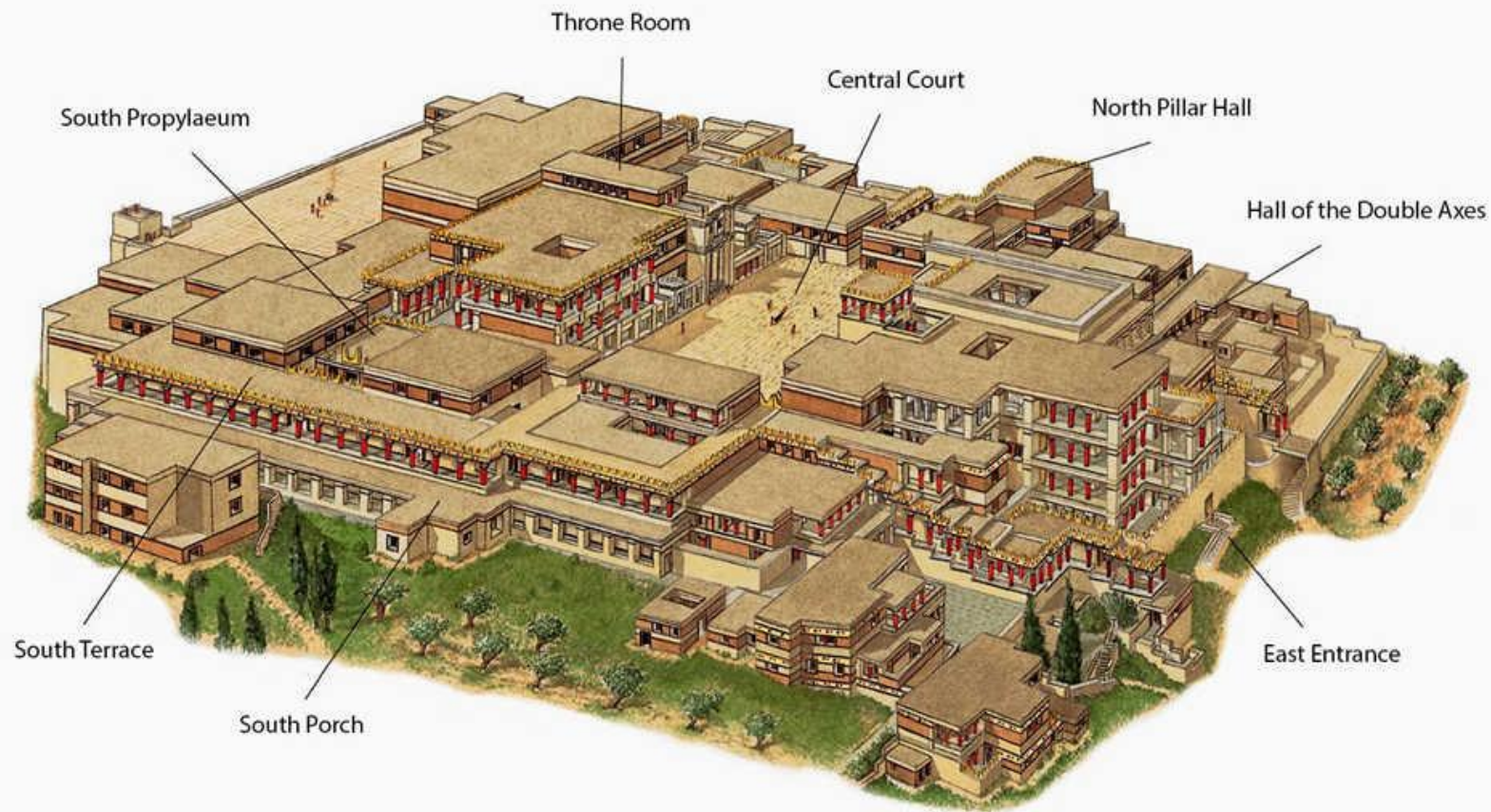
- Athenian Myths – told by Athenians, take place in Athens
- Cretan Myths – we hear about them from authors in the mainland, mostly from Athens
- The peak of Cretan civilization was during the Bronze Age; the island's inhabitants were not Greeks, originally, but by the second millennium BCE Crete was a great sea power
- Bulls and goddesses, both personifications of fertility, played important roles in the Cretan religion
- Crete was ruled by powerful kings, served by a caste of scribes, who oversaw and collected the agricultural produce of the rich inland and the coastal plains. They lived in enormous, complex palaces, which they decorated with remarkably realistic frescoes. In Crete, history has become intertwined with myth; we have only the myth, not the history. The elaborate buildings became a maze; the bull, a half-human monster.

Myths of Crete

- The ancient, bronze-age civilization on Crete is called Minoan after Minos, the great king of Crete; the name was given to the people of Crete by the English archaeologist Arthur Evans who excavated the great palace on Knossos in 1899
- Crete was inhabited by people who migrated there from Anatolia at around 7000 BCE; there was a second wave of immigration at about 3100 BCE
- The Bronze Age Cretans used Linear A for writing; the script remains undecipherable – unlike the Mycenaean Linear B writing, the prototype of the Greek language
- Minoan power came to an abrupt end about 1450 BCE, when palaces all over the island were destroyed by an unknown agency
- From this catastrophic period comes archaeological evidence of ritual cannibalism of children and human sacrifice, in an attempt to stave off impending disaster

Myths of Crete

- After 1450 BCE, only the palace on Knossos was rebuilt; it was destroyed again by a fire in 1400, and rebuilt, again, only to be destroyed for the last time in c. 1200 BCE
- The conflagrations that accompanied the second and third destruction accidentally preserved thousands of clay tablets inscribed in Greek Linear B – evidence that the Myceneans took over Crete after the destruction of 1450, which they may have caused themselves
- The biblical Philistines, who settled in five cities on the southwestern coast of Israel in about 1200 BCE, seem to have been Mycenaean Greeks from Crete; by c. 600 BCE, they had adopted a Semitic language, as proven by recent inscriptional finds
- Palestine takes its name from this Greek people
- We must remember that the Cretan elite before 1450 were Minoans: racially, linguistically, and culturally distinct from the Cretan rulers after 1450, who were Mycenaean Greeks, presumably invaders
- We do not have any Minoan myths; we have Greek, and especially Athenian, myths about Crete





The Hall of the Double Axes





Europa and the Bull

- Agenor (Semitic, 'lord of men') was descended from Zeus and Io.
- While his brother Belus (Semitic 'lord', Biblical Baal) ruled Egypt, Agenor traveled to the coast of the eastern Mediterranean
- There, in a land later called Phoenicia (modern Lebanon), he settled, married, and had a daughter – Europa – and three sons: Cadmus, Cilix, and Phoenix
- Zeus fell in love with the beautiful Europa and came to her in the form of a bull

“Soon the innocent princess, not knowing what lay in her future, dares climb up and sit on his shoulders. Slowly the god rises, slowly moves down to the shore and dips his feet in its ripples. Then— just a few steps further, and off he goes with his prize. The girl begins to worry, looks back at the shore she has left. Her right hand clutches a horn, the other clings to his back while her thin and fluttering dress is blown by a gathering breeze. At last the god abandons his treacherous masquerade, as they reach the coastline of Crete.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 2.834-3.2



An illustration from a 5th century BCE Greek red-figure pottery vase showing the myth of Europa and Zeus disguised as a bull. (Tarquinia Archaeological Museum, Italy)

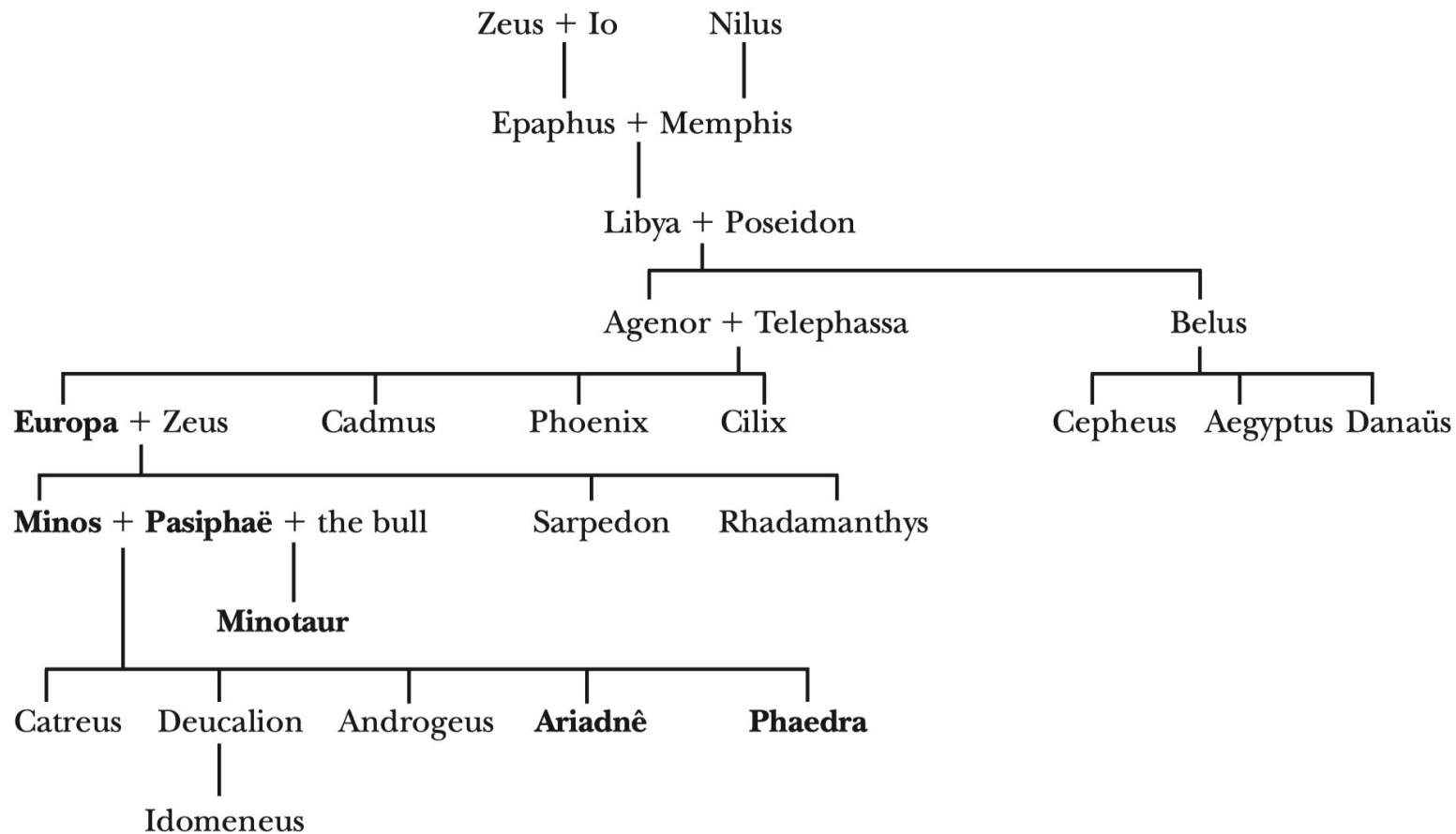


CHART 17 The House of Crete.

Europa and the Bull

- Soon Agenor discovered that his daughter was missing, and instructed his three sons to search for her – and not return until she is found.
- They traveled the world, but could not find her; afraid to return home, they settled in various lands: Phoenix near his first home in the land ever since called Phoenicia, Cilix in Cilicia (southeastern Turkey, northwest Lebanon), and Cadmus in Thebes (in central Greece)
- Zeus and Europa had several children: Minos, Sarpedon, and Rhadamanthys
- For protection, Zeus gave Europa Talus, a giant bronze robot that ran around the island three times each day and protected it (later important in the story of Jason)



Minos and Pasiphaë

- Eventually, Zeus tired of Europa and returned to Olympus; a local Cretan, Asterius, married her and looked after her three sons
- When the sons grew up, they all fell in love with the same boy; they quarreled furiously until Minos drove out his two brothers
- Sarpedon went to Lycia in southwest Anatolia, and Rhadamanthys went to Boeotia, the plain northwest of Attica – when he died, he became a judge among the dead, as did Minos
- When Asterius died, Minos claimed the kingship over Crete, boasting that Poseidon himself had promised him the throne; he asked that a bull should rise from the sea as a sign of his election; this, he would sacrifice in honor of the god who sent it



Minos and Pasiphaë

- A magnificent bull did rise from the sea, but Minos was not able to give it up, so splendid it was; he sent it to his herds, and sacrificed another bull instead
- Thus Minos became the powerful king of Crete, oversaw the land, and promulgated laws
- He married Pasiphaë ('all-shining'), a daughter of Helios, who bore him many children, among them Ariadne, Phaedra, and the prince Androgeüs
- Poseidon, who had sent the beautiful bull, was angry that Minos did not sacrifice it; he contrived a terrible punishment



Minos and Pasiphaë

- Poseidon made Pasiphaë fall helplessly in love with the bull; determined to satisfy her passion, Pasiphaë confided her problem to an Athenian man then living on Crete, Daedalus, the greatest craftsman of all time, inventor of statues
- A descendant of Cecrops (one of Athens' first kings), Daedalus was exiled from the polis because he had thrown his nephew from the acropolis in a fit of jealousy – Perdix invented the saw, in imitation of a fish's backbone
- Daedalus constructed a hollow wooden cow; Pasiphaë climbed inside; the bull mounted the wooden cow and impregnated the queen



Peter Goettler

Minos and Pasiphaë

- From this union came the dreaded Minotaur ('the bull of Minos'), a man-eating monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man
- Although shamed by his wife's behavior, Minos hesitated to kill the Minotaur, who, after all, was family
- he ordered Daedalus to build a prison capable of holding the monster: Daedalus designed a complex maze and in its center, the Minotaur was imprisoned
- No one who entered could find a way out, doomed to be eaten by the monster within



Minos and Scylla

- Minos' son Androgeüs, an excellent athlete, traveled to Athens to compete in the Panathenaic games, held every year on Athena's birthday
- Defeating every contender in every contest, he so annoyed Aegeus, king of Athens, that the king ordered him to fight a wild bull that was ravaging the plain of Marathon – this is the same bull that had impregnated Pasiphaë, which Heracles transported to the mainland, which Theseus will later kill
- The great beast killed Androgeüs, and when Minos learned of this, he immediately assembled his fleet to attack Athens



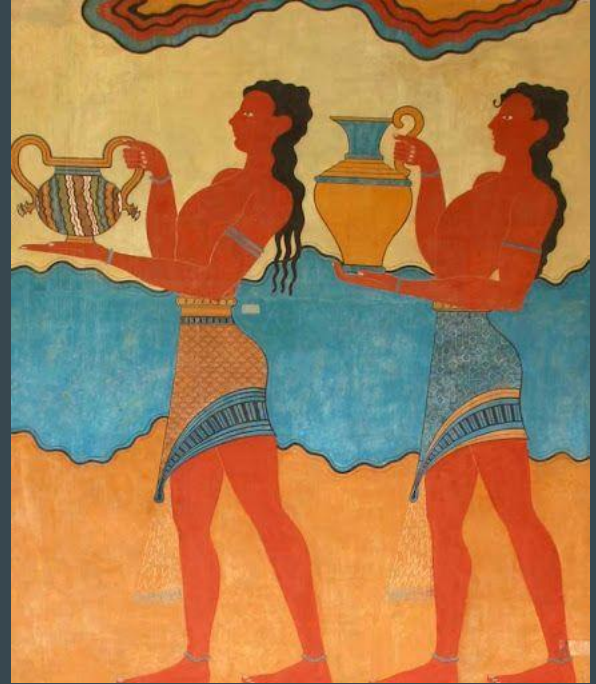
Minos and Scylla

- On his way to Athens, Minos besieged the coastal town of Megara, between Corinth and Athens; it was ruled by Nisus, a brother of Aegeus; Nisus was invulnerable as long as a certain purple lock grew on his head
- His daughter Scylla, standing on the city's towers, saw the handsome Minos and fell in love with him; she sent him a secret message, promising to cut off her father's lock if Minos promised to marry her after taking the city
- Minos agrees, but when the city fell, he spurned the treacherous daughter
- Scylla dived into the sea, followed Minos' ship, overtook it and was about to board when Nisus, turned into a bird of prey, swooped down on her; she fell back into the sea and escaped as a bird



Theseus and Amphitritē

- Minos now turned to Athens, but even after a long siege he could not take the city; he prayed to Zeus for help, and the god set plague and famine on Athens
- The Athenians died in large numbers; they consulted the oracle, who told them to capitulate to Minos, who, as punishment for the death of his son, ordered that every nine (or one) years the Athenians must send seven boys and seven girls, to be devoured by the Minotaur
- Several groups of youths had already been sent off to die by the time Theseus arrived in Athens; he volunteered to join the band of youths. On the voyage back to Crete, Minos was attracted to one of the Athenian maidens and made a pass on her; Theseus warned him against it



Theseus and Amphitritē

- To prove to Minos that he was equally deserving, Theseus boasted he, too, is the son of a god (Poseidon; Minos is Zeus' son)
 - Minos threw a ring to the sea and challenged Theseus to retrieve it; Theseus leapt into the water and came back with a wreath from Amphitritē, Poseidon's wife, as proof of his own divine descent
 - Nothing else is known of Minos' ring
-
- Theseus and Amphitritē, Attic wine cup, c. 500-490 BCE [Left to right: Theseus, Athena, and Amphitritē]



Theseus and the Minotaur

- When Theseus arrived on Crete, Minos' daughter Ariadne saw him and immediately fell in love with him (just as Scylla with Minos, and even Ishtar with Gilgamesh)
- She promised to show Theseus how to subdue the Minotaur, if he would take her away and marry her
- Following the instructions that Daedalus gave Ariadne, Theseus tied the end of a ball of thread to the door of the labyrinth and unrolled it behind him as he advanced inside the maze
- Theseus found the Minotaur in the innermost chamber of the maze, and killed him with his sword; that night he fled Crete with Ariadne

Theseus and the Minotaur, interior of an Athenian red-figured wine cup, c. 470 BCE. Notice Theseus' feet propped up against the frame; also the rocks, and the hat



Theseus and the Ariadne

- Theseus and Ariadne arrived on the island Naxos, but soon after, Theseus decided he was disgusted with Ariadne's betrayal of her father, and sailed to Athens, abandoning her on Naxos
- Walking into the sea, Ariadne was prepared to die, and with what she thought was her last breath, cursed Theseus
- Many versions tell that before returning to Athens, Theseus stopped on the island Delos, which was, alongside Delphi, a sacred site of Apollo; there, in the temple, he dedicated a statue of Aphrodite Ariadne had given him; he and the youths danced a complicated dance that imitated the corridors of the maze; the dance is called the crane dance, performed in classical times on the island during festivals



The Death of Minos

- Daedalus escaped and landed in Sicily, where he took refuge in the court of Cocalus; raging for revenge, Minos sought Daedalus everywhere
- To reveal him, Minos carried a spiral conch shell with him and promised a grand reward to whoever could pass a thread through its windings, knowing only Daedalus was clever enough to accomplish the feat
- He eventually came to the court of Cocalus, who wanted the reward; pretending he could solve the puzzle, Cocalus secretly sought Daedalus' help; the master craftsman drilled a hole in one end of the shell, attached a thread to an ant by a drop of honey, and allowed the ant to draw the thread through
- When Cocalus presented the shell to Minos, the king knew he found Daedalus; he demanded the inventor be surrendered to him. Cocalus agreed but asked that first, Minos joined him for dinner
- When Minos went to bathe before the feat, Cocalus' daughters filled the tub with boiling water and burned him to death.
- Nothing else is known of Daedalus

The House of Asterion / Jorge Luis Borges

- [Listen](#) (1:30)

Boys performing
a 'bull-leaping':
either an
athletic
competition or a
ritual; perhaps
the origin of the
Minotaur



Myths of Thebes

In Thebes, “mortal women were the mothers of gods”
(Sophocles, fragment)

- Thebes is the main city (polis) in Boeotia, south of Attica and the Peloponnese
- In the Bronze Age and the Classical period, Thebes was a center of power as well as a focus for a complex cycle of legends, next in importance only to those of Mycenae
- Thebes has been inhabited continuously for more than five thousand years; as a result, the modern town covers the ancient remains and inhibits archaeological excavations
- Some of the best known Athenian tragedies describe the myths and legends of this city, taking many of their stories from an epic poem – now lost – the Thebais, Story of Thebes, attributed (perhaps rightly) to Homer



Myths of Thebes: Founding of the city

- A unique city, Thebes has two founding stories
- The first begins with Europa, the Phoenician princess; after disappearing upon the back of the bull, her father, Agenor, ordered his sons, including Cadmus, to search for her and not return without her; as the brothers lost hope of finding their sister, two of three brothers gave up and settled down, founding their own kingdoms
- Only Cadmus continued to look for Europa, but he too was unsuccessful; he went to Delphi, where the Pythia told him he would never find his sister. Instead, she said, he should follow a cow with special markings and found a city at the spot where she will stop to rest. Cadmus did as he was told.



Myths of Thebes: Founding of the city

- Wishing to sacrifice the cow to Zeus (or Athena), Cadmus sent some of his companions to a nearby spring sacred to Ares, to draw water for the sacrifice
- When they did not return, he went himself and found that a huge serpent, a dragon, had killed them all
- Cadmus defeated the dragon in a great battle, then, at Athena's request, knocked out the dragon's teeth, plowed the ground, and sowed half of the teeth into the furrow
- The other half, Athena gave to Aeëtes, king of Colchis, who figures in the legend of Jason



Cadmus slaying the dragon; Athenian red-figured wine-mixing bowl, c. 450 BCE
Beside the dragon sits Harmonia, the future wife of Cadmus; her father, Ares, stands behind her
The vegetation behind the serpent indicate the spring; Cadmus holds the pitcher for the sacrificial water in one hand, in the other, he holds a stone to kill the dragon; Athena stands behind him

Myths of Thebes: Founding of the city

- From the planted teeth sprang armed men. Cadmus threw more stones at them; thinking they were being attacked, they began battling each other
- Eventually only five remained, and they were the Sparti (no relation to Sparta), “sown men”, ancestors of the principal aristocratic families of Thebes
- In payment for slaying the dragon, Cadmus had to serve Ares for eight years; once purified, he married Harmonia, daughter of Aphrodite and Ares
- Their wedding was one of the two most splendid in Greek myth, the other being that of Peleus and Thetis, parents of Achilles
- Even the gods attended their wedding, seated in golden chairs and singing praise
- As a wedding gift, Aphrodite gave her daughter a necklace made by Hephaestus himself, and a robe that gave its wearer royal dignity: beautiful gifts that will prove troublesome to whoever owned them in later generations
- The children of Cadmus and Harmonia were to lead accursed lives: Ino killed her own children, then jumped off a cliff; a thunderbolt burned Semele to a crisp; Agavê ripped her own son Pentheus apart; Autoon's son, Actaeon, was devoured by his hounds
- Grown old by age and grief, eventually Cadmus and Harmonia left Thebes; they wandered the earth until settling down in Illyria (modern Albania). There, too, they ruled; enfeebled by age, they were turned into serpents and sent by Zeus to live forever in the Elysian Fields

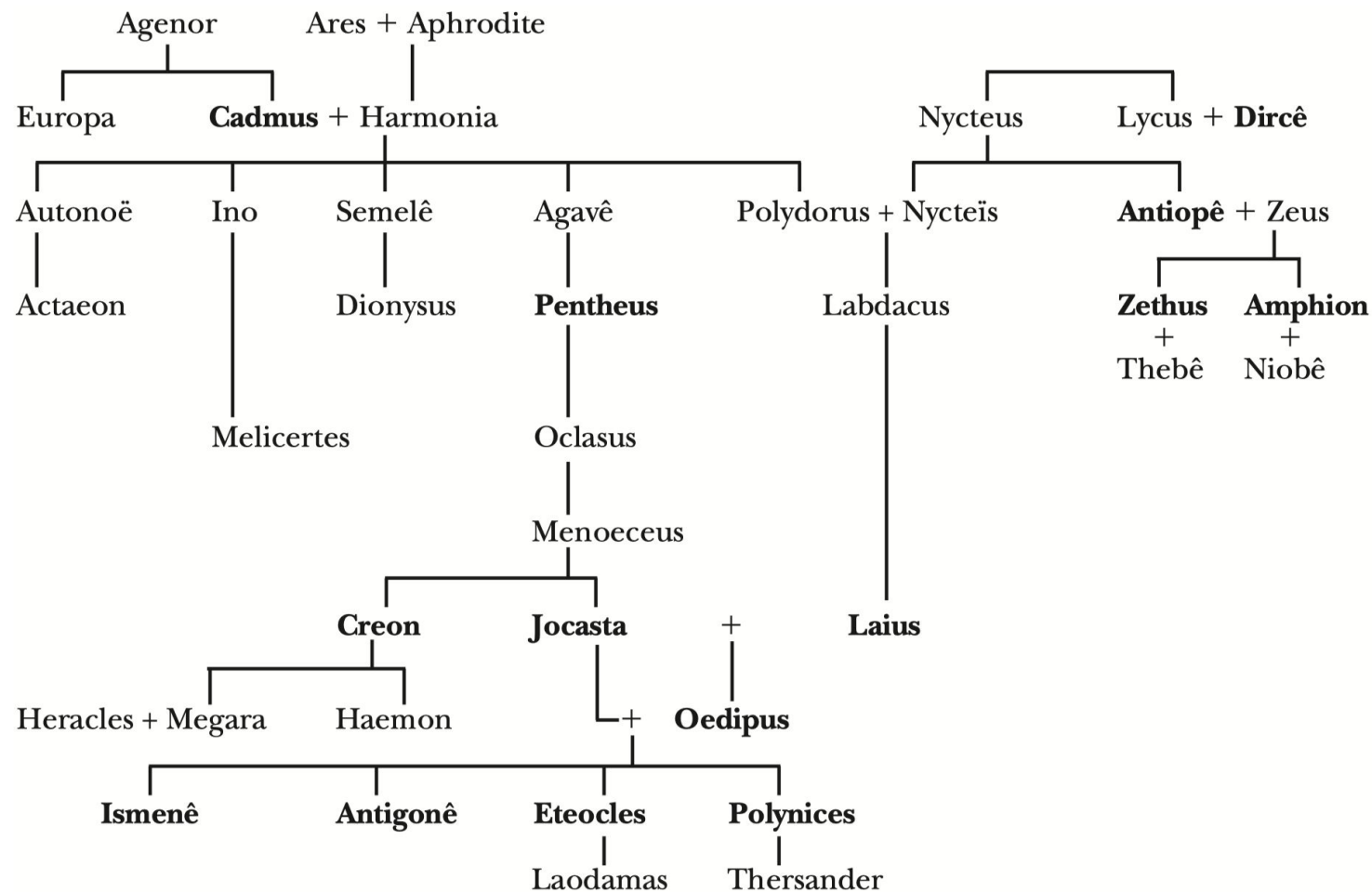


CHART 18 The House of Cadmus.

The twins Amphion and Zethus

- After Cadmus abdicated, his grandson Pentheus ruled Thebes briefly, until coming to his gruesome end; the dynastic succession then becomes confused
- A separate tradition reports that an otherwise unknown son of Cadmus, Polydorus, came to the throne, married a woman, Nycteïs, and on his deathbed turned over the kingship to her father, Nycteus
- In the meantime, Zeus seduced Nycteus' other daughter, Antiope, who became pregnant. Shamed by her misdeed, Nycteus banished Antiope from Thebes; she married the king of Sicyon in the Peloponnese
- Nycteus was still ashamed of her behavior, though, so he ordered his son, Lycus, to avenge the family honor and then kill himself
- Lycus mounted a campaign against Sicyon, killed the king, and took Antiope back to Thebes; on the way there, she crawled into the bushes of Mount Cithaeron and gave birth to the twins she was carrying; she left them there, and a shepherd found them and raised them. They were Amphion and Zethus
- In Thebes, Lycus gave Antiope to his wife, Dirce, to handle; she harbored a particular hatred for the princess, locked her in a cell and tormented her daily
- Antiope eventually managed to escape, fled to Mount Cithaeron, where by chance she received refuge by the same shepherd; somehow her sons recognized her, and tracked down Dirce as she was worshipping Dionysus; they tied her to a bull that dragged her until she died. They also killed Lycus

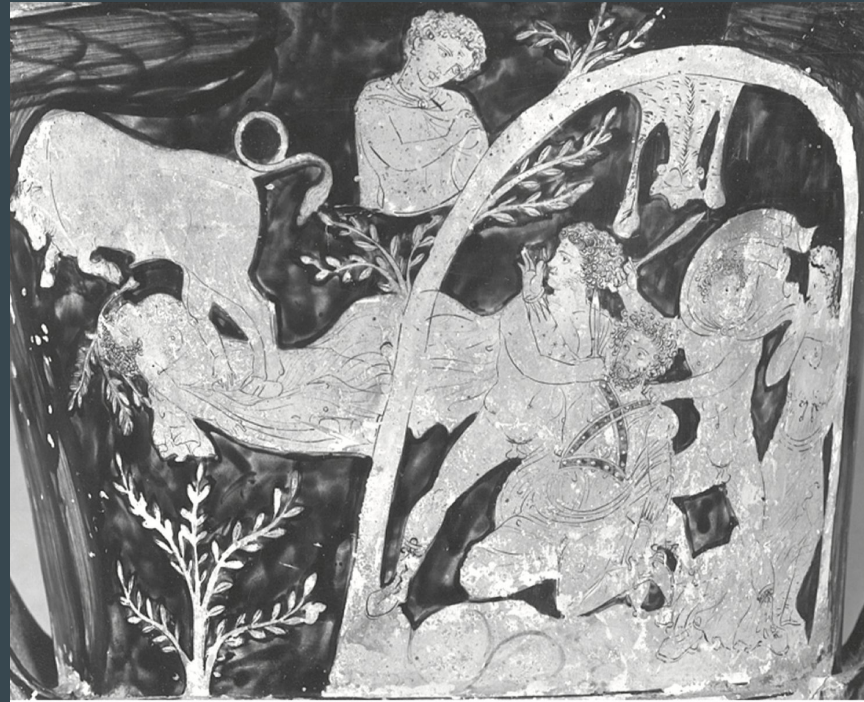
The twins Amphion and Zethus

- As they grew up, the twins could not be more different: Zethus was a cattle breeder, a man of action and practical affairs; he scorned Amphion, who spent his time practicing the lyre
- But the power of art proved itself when the brothers set out to build the walls of Thebes, a story that described, in effect, a second foundation: the first thing one does in founding a city is to erect fortifications
- Zethus struggled to carry the rocks on his back while Amphion played his lyre, and the stones, floating in the air, followed his melody and settled into place
- Despite their differences, the brothers were friends and ruled together in harmony. Zethus married Thebē, after whom Thebes is named. Amphion married Niobē, daughter of Tantalus; they had seven sons and seven daughters, all of whom were killed by Apollo and Artemis



The Two Foundings of Thebes

- Most Greek colonies have stories of their foundation and the reasons for them, but the old mainland cities lacked such traditions. Why, then, should Thebes alone have not one but two such stories? No one has answered the question persuasively, and it is clear that the two traditions, once separate, have come together in a clumsy way
- The founding by Cadmus is an adaptation of the ancient Near Eastern myth of creation as dragon combat, whose basic pattern we examined in the story of Marduk's victory over Tiamat; Cadmus kills a terrible dragon that guards a spring, as Marduk kills the monster Tiamat, who represents the chaotic waters from which the world emerged.
- Judging from a fifth-century BCE vase, the dragon-slayer's prize was a woman – Harmonia – as often is the case in the folktale pattern; Cadmus' sowing of the teeth is a variation of another Near Eastern motif whereby the first men grew from the earth like plants
- A tale that once described the origin of the world has been downgraded to describe the origin of a city
- Many have wondered whether Phoenicians really did found a colony at Thebes in the Bronze Age, perhaps bringing with them the ancient Mesopotamian myth of creation, an explanation supported by Cadmus' name – Semitic for 'man from the East'



The Two Foundings of Thebes

- In 1963, an astonishing hoard of 42 Mesopotamian cylinder seals was found in a basement in the modern town of Thebes on the site of the ancient city, the largest collection of cylinder seals found anywhere; the find seems to prove Eastern settlement
- But the seals come from different Eastern lands and belong to different periods, the earliest from about 2500 BCE and the latest from about 1300 BCE. Apparently, a precious collection, which may have been acquired as trade or booty, it was kept in a single box when the Mycenaean palace was burned at about 1250 BCE; no other evidence of Eastern presence has been found in Thebes
- According to a strong tradition, Cadmus brought with him from the East something more precious than seals, called *phoinikeia grammata*, 'Phoenician scratchings', or *kadmeia*, 'Cadmeian things' – early Greek terms for the alphabet. However, this story cannot be entirely accurate since the Greek alphabet (which includes signs for vowels) was invented on the basis of the Phoenician syllabic writing at about 800 BCE, while Cadmus belongs to the middle Bronze Age, perhaps about 1600 BCE, according to mythical chronology based on counting generations
- Mythographers knew that the model for the Greek alphabet was Phoenician, and that Cadmus was Phoenician; therefore, they reasoned, Cadmus must have introduced the alphabet



Fig. B

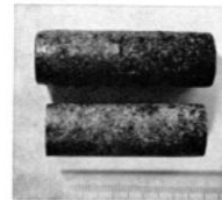


Fig. C



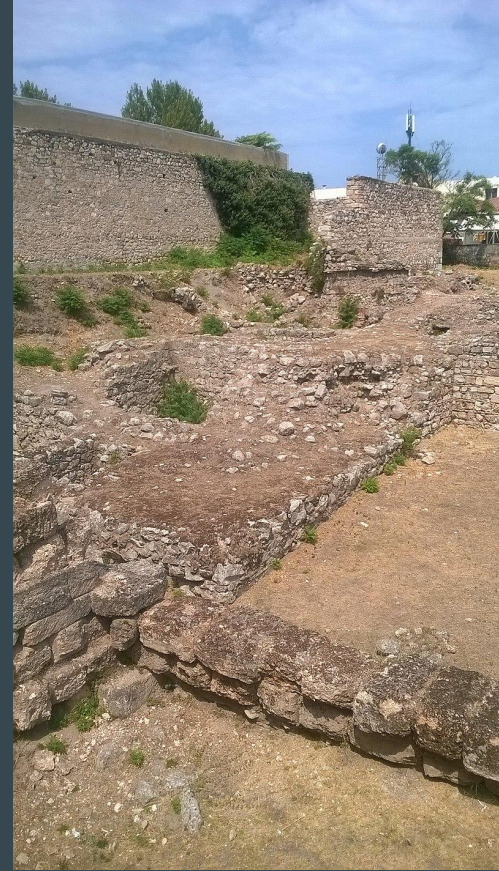
Fig. D



Fig. E

The Two Foundings of Thebes

- To answer for the double founding stories, the Thebans considered Cadmus the founder of Thebes' acropolis, where a palace lay, called the Cadmea, and the twins founders of the lower city and its walls



Oedipus the King

- Later mythographers tried to tie the story of Amphion and Zethus to the House of Cadmus by reporting that Polydorus and Nycteis had a son named Labdacus, whose son Laius fled Thebes in the confusion to take refuge in the court of Pelops, in the province of Elis in the northwestern Peloponnese. There, Laius fell in love with Chrysippus, son of Pelops, lured him out of town, and raped him
- Pelops cursed Laius for this outrage, as well as the violation of xenia (hospitality relationships). Laius fled back to Thebes, where Amphion and Zethus had already died, and the throne was left vacant. The people of Thebes acclaimed Laius as king, and he married Jocasta, a descendant of the Sparti. Learning from an oracle that he would die at the hands of his son, Laius avoided intercourse with his wife, except for one night when he got drunk and bedded her.
- When Jocasta had a son, Laius ordered the baby to be exposed to death. He pinned together the infant's feet in an iron pin (to keep the ghost from walking) and delivered him to a shepherd with orders to leave him on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron
- However, the shepherd took pity on the child and gave him to a friend who was visiting, a man from Corinth, who gave the child to Polybus, king of Corinth. His childless wife, Meropē, took the child as her own and called him Oedipus, 'swollen feet'
- Growing up, Oedipus' age-mates teased him about being adopted; confused, Oedipus consulted the Delphic Pythia, who, instead of telling him whether he was adopted, told him he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother; horrified, Oedipus swore never to return to Corinth – thinking the oracle meant Polybus and Merope – and headed to Thebes instead

Oedipus the King

- On his way to Thebes, at the fork in the road, a man in a chariot came from the other direction and drove Oedipus off the road; a wheel in the chariot grazed his foot, and the man struck him with his goad. In a rage, Oedipus leaped onto the chariot and killed the driver, his passenger, and all his retainers, except for one who got away
- Before long, Oedipus came to Thebes, a city in turmoil. The Sphinx had perched on a nearby hill and was devouring the Thebans one by one. Before killing her victims, the Sphinx posed a riddle – only once the riddle was answered would the Sphinx leave Thebes: there are many versions of the riddle, but the best known is:

What goes on four in the morning, two at midday, and three in the evening?



Oedipus the King

- Laius, the king, had gone to Delphi to find out what to do about this situation. His brother-in-law Creon, who ruled in Laius' absence, heard that bandits killed the king on his way to the Pythia; he decreed that whoever could solve the Sphinx' riddle and freed the city could marry the queen and become the new king of Thebes; clever Oedipus, upon coming to Thebes, solved it
- Thus Oedipus married the queen. They had two sons – Polynices and Eteocles – and two daughters – Antigone and Ismene
- Our earliest literary source for the story of Oedipus is the *Odyssey*, in which Odysseus, reviewing the ghosts of famous dead women, sees Oedipus' mother-wife (Hom. Od. 11.1271-1280)
- Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* (or *Oedipus Tyrannos*), performed c. 430 BCE, the most famous play from antiquity, treats the shocking story in clinical detail and seems to have added certain important elements: when the play opens, a plague has fallen on the city; Oedipus the King, decisive in action and attentive to the needs of his people, learns from an oracle that miasma, blood-pollution, has caused the plague: in the confusion surrounding the Sphinx, no one has taken the time to investigate the murder of Laius
- Determined to lift the plague, Oedipus orders any one who knows anything of Laius' death to come forward, and the killer must die



Oedipus the King

- Thus Oedipus curses himself, for the man he killed at the crossroads was Laius, and the woman he marries his mother, as the oracle foretold. The rest of Sophocles' play is a masterful unfolding of how these terrible events have come to pass.
- On Creon's advice, Oedipus summons the blind seer Tiresias, who at first refuses to speak to him. When Oedipus accuses him of conspiring against him with Creon, Tiresias bursts out the truth, but Oedipus dismisses it and turns against Creon
- When a man comes into the city and describes the death of Laius, Oedipus is shaken by the close correspondence between the account and his own experience at the crossroads
- A messenger arrives and informs Oedipus that his 'father' Polybus has died and that he may now succeed to the throne of Corinth; although grieving, Oedipus is relieved at the seeming proof that the oracle was wrong – he did not kill his father after all! But Oedipus still was reluctant to return to Corinth, for fear he would somehow marry his mother
- But the messenger continues, saying Oedipus should not worry about that because he is, after all, adopted. The messenger himself has delivered Oedipus to the royal Corinthian couple's hands



Oedipus the King

- At this point Jocasta realized the truth and leaves the stage (the entire play takes place right outside the Theban palace). Oedipus summons an old shepherd, the only survivor of the massacre at the crossroads, who, by an extraordinary coincidence, is the same man Laius once ordered to kill his son; the shepherd confesses he did not kill the boy but gave him to the Corinthian messenger
- At this point Oedipus too sees the truth and rushes into the palace. A messenger comes outside to report what had happened:

Frenzied, Jocasta rushed inside the house
And flung herself upon her marriage bed,
Tearing her hair with both her maddened hands.
She slammed and locked the door by which she entered
And cried the name of Laius, long since dead,
Joined with his son's, the man he once begat,
At whose hands he then died, leaving her to mother
Sons by her son— a dreadful generation.
How then she died I cannot know or tell,
For Oedipus burst in with cries of torment,
Preventing us from gazing on her end—
For all our eyes were riveted on him,
As he stormed about and clamored for his sword.
“Where will I find the wife who is no wife?
He cried, “the womb twice plowed, twice harvested,

Of me at first, then later by my children?”
Some demon, doubtless, pointed out the way
To the frenzied king. It surely was none of us.
With madman's scream he charged the double doors,
Led by some instinct, dragged the bolts from out
Their pair of sockets, and ran inside.
Hanged from the ceiling, there we saw his wife
Choked by a twisted rope around her neck.
Oedipus saw her too. With a piteous groan
He loosened the throttling noose around her throat.
Her huddled lay there at his feet,
A piteous sight, but worse was still to come.

Oedipus the King

He ripped the golden pins from her robe,
Raised them on high, and plunged them in his eyes,
Choking out words of anguish, such as these:
“Never again will these eyes ever watch
me doing or suffering what I have done or suffered!
Only in inner darkness of my soul
Shall I hereafter see the faces of those
I never should have seen, and I shall fail
To see the missing forms, for which I longed.”
Cursing himself, again, and yet again,
He slashed his eyes, and with each frenzied blow
The bleeding sockets dripped down on his beard,
Until at last the drops became a storm.

Soph. Oed. 1241-1279

Sophocles, Oedipus at Colonus

[Oedipus prepares to die, off-stage; a messenger reports] [O.] “Children, this day your father is gone from you. All that was mine is gone. You shall no longer bear the burden of taking care of me – I know it was hard, my children. And yet one word frees us of all the weight and pain of life: that word is love. You never shall have more from anyone than you have had from me. And now you must spend the rest of life without me.” That was the way of it. They clung together and wept, all three. But when they finally stopped and no more sobs were heard, then there was silence, and in the silence suddenly a voice cried out to him—

of such a kind it made our hair stand up in panic fear: again and again the call came from the god: “Oedipus! Oedipus! Why are we waiting? You delay too long; you delay too long to go!”

...

But after a little while as we withdrew we turned around – and nowhere saw that man, but only the king, his hands before his face, shading his eyes as if from something fearful, awesome and unendurable to see.

...

Some attendant from the train of heaven came for him; or else the underworld opened in love the unlit door of earth.

Jason and the Argonauts

- Thessaly: the widest plain in Greece. Thessaly was the northernmost mainland outpost of Greece before the colonization in the Archaic period, which carried them further north and across foreign seas.
- In Homer's Iliad, Thessaly is famous for being the birthplace of Achilles
- In its southeastern edge lies a peninsula called Magnesia; the highest peak is Mount Pelion, and at its foot lay the Bronze Age city of Iolcus, where, although the modern town covers most of the ancient ruins, remains of two Mycenaean palaces were found.



Jason and the Argonauts

- From Iolcus, Jason and the Argonauts set forth, a generation before the Trojan War.
- Homer's *Odyssey*, composed in the 8th century BCE, refers to the voyage of the Argonauts as a familiar tale
- However, the most important literary version of Jason and his comrades' tale is the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes, in the third century BCE, whose account we follow
- Euripides' play *Medea*, from the Classical Period, gives the best-known account of Jason's later years



Prelude to the Argonautica

- Jason belonged to the family of the Aeolids, descendants of Aeolus, eponym for the Aeolians, a tribe of northern and central Greece
- Aeolus was king of Magnesia in Thessaly, a son of Hellên; he had seven sons, including Athamas, one of the unluckiest men in Greek mythology
- When Athamas came of age, he traveled south to Boeotia and became king of a town called Orchomenus; he married Nephelê ('cloud') and had a boy, Phrixus, and a girl, Hellê



The Fury of Athamas by John Flaxman (1755-1826)

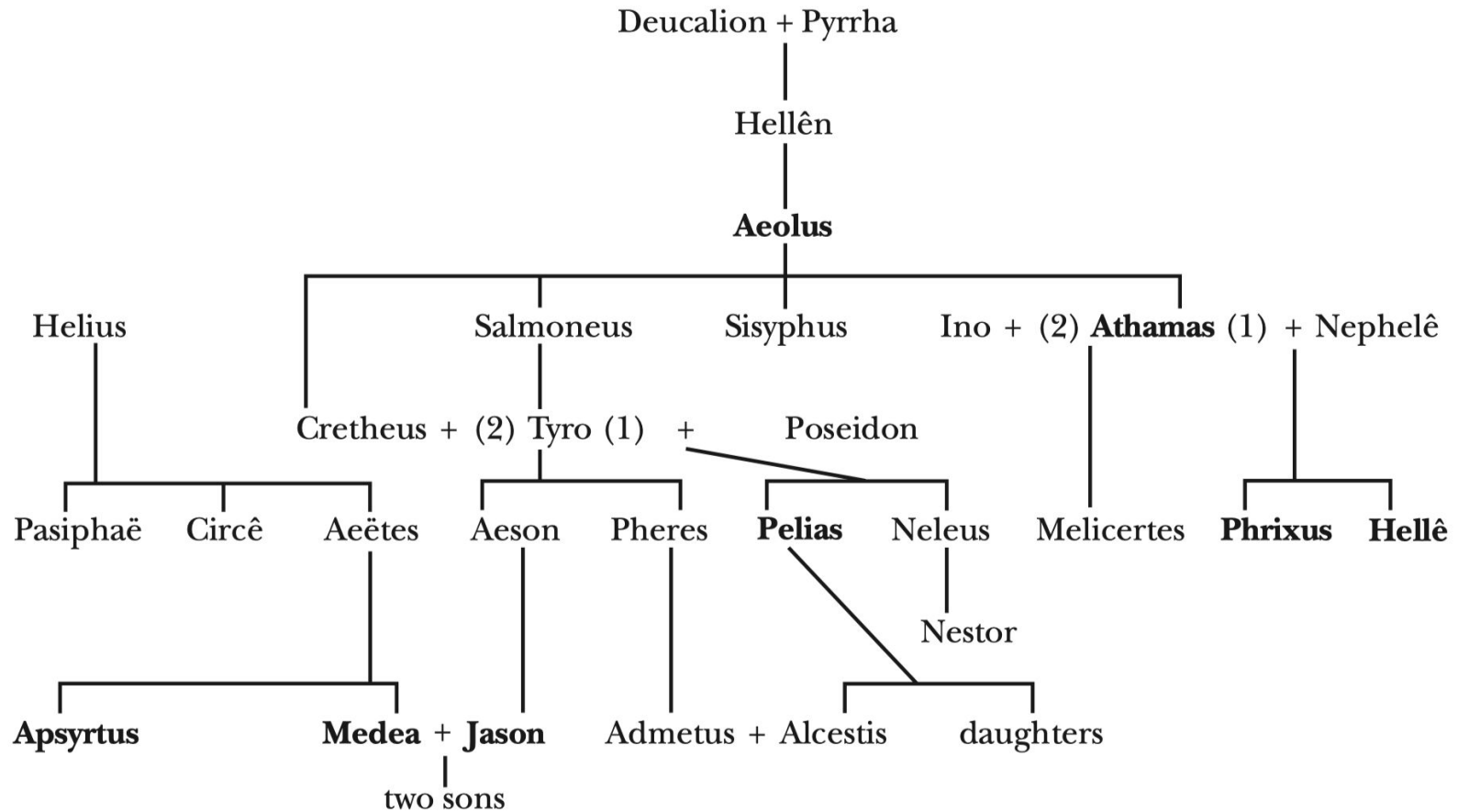


CHART 19.1 The House of Aeolus.

Prelude to the Argonautica

- Athamas eventually grew tired of his first wife and took a second one, Ino, daughter of Cadmus (and nurse to Dionysus!)
- Ino bore Athamas two sons, and grew jealous of Phrixus who will inherit the throne over her own sons
- She therefore contrived a plot to destroy her stepchild, and persuaded the local women to parch the seed grain. The crop failed and famine soon fell on the land, so Athamas— as Ino foreseen— inquired with the Pythia at Delphi about a solution



The Fury of Athamas by John Flaxman (1755-1826)

Prelude to the Argonautica

- Ino intercepted the messengers and bribed them to falsely report that Apollo's reply ordered that, to restore fertility to the land, Athamas must sacrifice his firstborn son
- Athamas sorrowfully led his son to the altar, but just as he was about to stab, a golden ram appeared beside the altar (like the ram in the Bible that appears as a substitute for Isaac, Genesis 22:13)
- As Athamas stood back, Phrixus and his sister climbed on the ram's back, and the animal carried them away, never again to be seen



The Fury of Athamas by John Flaxman (1755-1826)

Prelude to the Argonautica

- As the ram passed over the entrance to the straits between the northern Aegean and the Propontis, Hellê lost her grip and tumbled to her death in the narrow straits, still today called the Hellespont – sea of Hellê
- The ram finally stopped at the town of Colchis, in the land of Aea (‘earth’) at the eastern end of the Black Sea, perhaps in modern Georgia.
- There the tyrant Aeëtes (‘earth-man’) ruled. He was the son of Helius, and brother to Circê and Pasiphaë, wife of Minos king of Crete



The Fury of Athamas by John Flaxman (1755-1826)

Prelude to the Argonautica

- Phrixus sacrificed the ram to Zeus in honor and gratitude; he gave the skin to Aeëtes, who hung it from an oak tree in a grove of Ares
- Pelts of sacrificed animals often were hung from trees near the altar; in Colchis, a great dragon protected the skin, born from the blood of the monster Typhoeus
- Aeëtes honored Phrixus by giving him one of his daughters to marry
- Later, Ino raised Dionysus, her nephew, son of her sister Semele, causing Hera's intense jealousy. In vengeance, Hera struck Athamas with insanity. Athamas went mad and slew one of his sons, Learchus; Ino, to escape the pursuit of her frenzied husband, threw herself into the sea with her son Melicertes



The Fury of Athamas by John Flaxman (1755-1826)

Jason

- Salmoneus, brother of Athamas, has a daughter named Tyro, who gave birth to Pelias
- Pelias grew up to be arrogant and intolerant; he aspired to supreme power over Thessaly and drive out his brother Neleus – who migrated to Magnesia in the southwestern Peloponnese to found the dynasty of Pylos
- Pelias kept his half-brother Aeson imprisoned in the palace of Iolcus, who for some reason is said to be the rightful heir
- Pelias took a wife and fathered several daughters (including Alcestis!)
- Finally, Aeson's wife bore a son, but she feared for the child's life and so with the help of her maids spread a rumor he was stillborn; instead, she sent him to the wise and civilized centaur Chiron



Jason with the Golden Fleece
by Bertel Thorvaldsen

Jason

- Chiron named the son of Aeson Jason, taught him the arts of civilized life, and raised him to manhood.
- In the meantime, Pelias learned from an oracle that a man with one sandal would one day bring about his demise
- When Jason grew to maturity, he traveled to Iolcus, determined to claim the throne. He arrived during a festival to Poseidon (Pelias' father). Jason came to a rain-swollen stream by which an old woman sat, crouched. He hoisted her on his shoulders and carried her across, but lost a sandal in the torrent.
- Having no time to look for it, Jason set the woman on the other bank and hurried into the city, not realizing the woman was Hera in disguise



Jason with the Golden Fleece
by Bertel Thorvaldsen

Jason

- Hera hated Pelias because he did not honor her, and decided to destroy him through the beautiful Medea, daughter of Aeëtes, king of Colchis.
- Jason's kindness made Hera decide he was capable of bringing Medea to Greece, thereby punishing the irreverent Pelias. It was a very roundabout plot for Hera to exact revenge
- Pelias was busy at sacrifice when he heard that a one-sandaled man was standing at the marketplace; straightaway he confronted the stranger: "What would you do if you knew someone was going to kill you, someone over whom you had power?" Pelias asked; "I'd send him to recover the Golden Fleece," replied Jason; "I shall do as you suggest," Pelias said: "Go!"

Pelias, king of Iolcos, stops on the steps of a temple as he recognizes young Jason by his missing sandal; Roman fresco from Pompeii, 20-25 CE



Argo's Voyage

- Jason summoned Argus ('swift'), who constructed the largest ship ever made, which could hold fifty men; Athena inserted into its prow a magical, speaking beam, cut from Zeus' oracular oak at Dodona. The ship was named Argo after its builder
- Jason sent out a call to the best fighting men of his day, who gathered from far and near. Among them were **Heracles; Orpheus; the Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces;** the Boreads, Zetes and Calaïs, sons of Boreas, the North Wind; Telamon, father of Ajax, and his brother Peleus (father of Achilles); Meleager; the brothers Idas and Lynceus; Admetus, who married Alcestis; Augeas, whose stables Heracles cleaned; Tiphys, the helmsman; the seer Idmon; and Argus himself. At the last minute, Pelias' own son Acastus ran out and leapt onto the ship.

The Argonauts gather, an Athenian wine-mixing bowl, c. 475-450 BCE





Argo's Voyage

- Heracles, showing his incredible strength, pulled so hard on his oar that it snapped in two; they put the ship in the coast of Mysia for him to cut another
- While Heracles looked for a good tree, his boyfriend Hylas, along for the ride, went inland to look for water
- Lustful water-nymphs pulled him into a spring; Heracles heard him scream, but could not find him
- The next morning the Argonauts put to sea, but noticing that Heracles and Hylas are missing, wanted to go back
- However, the winged Zetes and Calais, insisted they push forward; Heracles later killed them for this.



In Colchis

- Jason and his crew – after some minor adventures – arrive in Colchis
- Jason and several of his companions went to the palace to make their request
- First of the Colchians to see the hero was the sorceress Medea, the king's daughter, agent of Hera's complicated plan to kill Pelias
- Hera persuaded Aphrodite to send Eros to prick Medea with such love for Jason that she would help him against her cruel father, who despised foreigners because of an oracle that warned him that foreigners would bring about his undoing, and had no intention of giving up the fleece



Jason and Medea - as depicted by
John William Waterhouse, 1907

In Colchis

- Although Jason promised he only wanted the fleece, Aeëtes announced he would give Jason the fleece if Jason successfully yoked two fire-breathing, bronze-hoofed bulls, plowed up the ground, and sowed in the furrow the dragon's teeth left over from the monster that Cadmus killed at Thebes
- Jason would also need to destroy the armed warriors who would spring up from the earth
- Jason fell into deep depression, not finding a way to overcome these challenges
- Fortunately, Medea, driven by her love for Jason, secretly met with him and gave him a magic ointment to spread on his sword, shield, and body; Jason in return would marry her



Jason and Medea - as depicted by
John William Waterhouse, 1907

Escape from Colchis

- Once successful, Jason demanded the fleece, but Aeëtes would not give it up
- Medea, realizing that she was about to be discovered, led Jason to the fleece and put the unsleeping dragon to sleep with another magic potion
- The snatched the fleece, ran to the Argo, and rowed downriver into the open sea
- Aeëtes gathered his fleet and gave pursuit; he split his fleet into two, one headed by himself, the other half commanded by his son Apsyrtus
- The parties of Apsyrtus and Jason met; Medea led her brother into a trap, and Jason killed him, chopped off his fingers and toes, and three times sucked up the blood and spat it out – to confuse the ghost



Jason and Medea - as depicted by
John William Waterhouse, 1907

Escape from Colchis

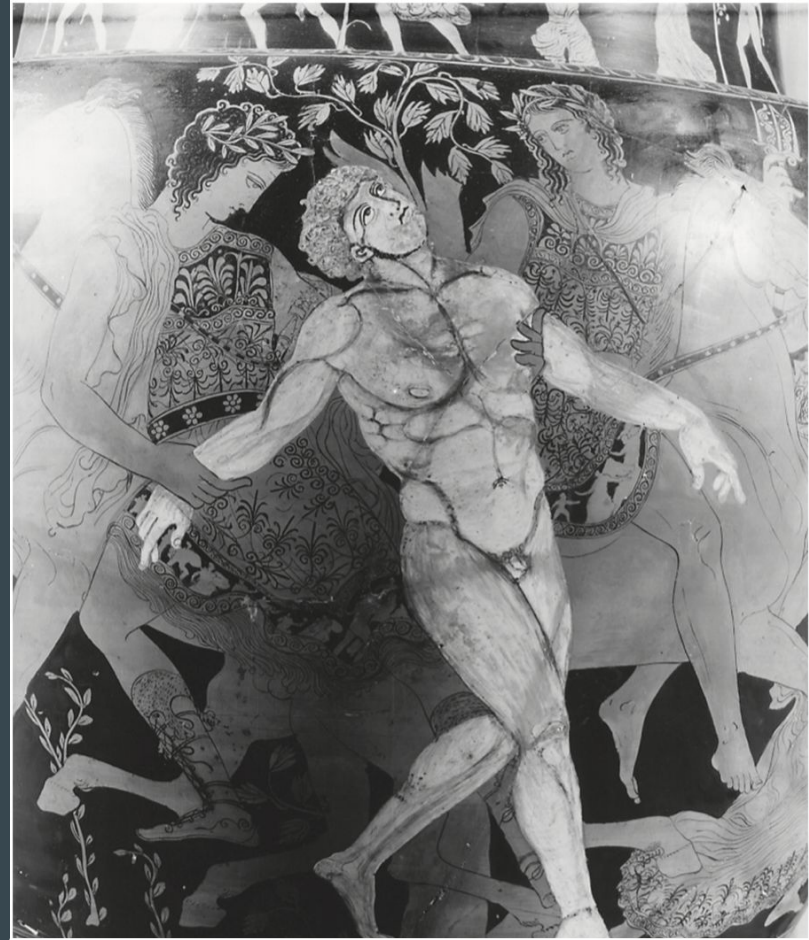
- He then buried him, according to Apollonius, but another well-known version has Apsyrtus as a little boy whom Medea kidnapped, cut into pieces, and dropped piece by piece overboard to slow her pursuing father who would have to collect the pieces to bring his son to proper burial
- After some sailing, a huge wave carried the ship inland, dropping it amid the burning sands. They carried their ship for nine days and nights until they arrived in Lake Tritonis
- They dragged themselves to a nearby grove, hoping to find water; instead, they came upon the Garden of the Hesperides, where the nymph¹ wept for the serpent Ladon, now killed by Heracles



The serpent disgorges Jason, the interior of an Athenian wine cup, c. 470 BCE. The scene preserves a version of the myth absent from literary accounts in which the dragon swallows Jason, who emerges again alive; Athena stands in front of him. The golden fleece hangs from a tree in the background

Escape from Colchis

- He arrived before the Argonauts did in his quest to retrieve the apples
- The Argonauts fled from Heracles
- They reembarked the Argo and the sea-god Triton, taking pity on them as they circled the lake aimlessly, took them back to the Mediterranean
- They headed north to Crete, but as soon as they saw the land, huge boulders were thrown at them, tossed by the bronze giant Talus, whom Zeus had gifted Europa
- The giant had one vein of ichor, the liquid that serves as the blood of gods, replenished through a hole in its ankle
- Medea fixed him with her evil eye so that he would strike his ankle against a rock that dislodged the plug that held the divine liquid within



The death of Talus – Athenian red-figured wine jug, c. 400 BCE
The collapsing giant is caught by the mounted Dioscuri brothers

The Argonauts
fight Talus,
from
Ray Harryhausen's
film, Jason and
The Argonauts
(1963)



The Death of Pelias

- Meanwhile back in Iolcus, rumors have spread that the Argo had sunk and all the warriors dead
- Pelias congratulated himself as the first human to escape the fate predicted by an oracle
- He decided to finish off his hated half-brother Aeson; during a sacrifice, he graciously permitted the old man to drink bull's blood – a deadly poison!
- Aeson's wife understood what happened, went into the palace, and cursed the king
- She killed herself with a sword, leaving behind a young son whom Pelias murdered



Jason bringing Pelias the Golden Fleece; a winged victory prepares to crown him with a wreath. Side A from an Apulian red-figure calyx crater, 340–330 BCE.

The Death of Pelias

- Jason's voyage lasted four months; when he returned and presented the golden fleece to Pelias, the haughty king accepted it but showed no signs of relinquishing the throne
- Medea decided to get rid of Pelias: through the power of her magic, she could make Pelias young again, Medea explained to the king's daughters
- To show what she meant, she cut up an old ram, boiled the pieces in a pot for several hours, then removed the top: out popped a young lamb
- The daughters were persuaded, and that night, they sneaked into their father's chamber, chopped him in pieces, and brought them to Medea
- She cooked them, but the magic did not occur: apologizing, Medea said she must have forgotten one ingredient



Jason bringing Pelias the Golden Fleece; a winged victory prepares to crown him with a wreath. Side A from an Apulian red-figure calyx crater, 340–330 BCE.

The Death of Pelias

- Hera's revenge was finally dealt, but the Iolcans loved their king and drove Jason out of Iolcus forever, hero or not, as well as Medea
- The star-crossed lovers traveled south to Corinth and settled there... Until:
- The play Medea by Euripides begins with Medea in a blind rage towards Jason for arranging to marry Glauce, the daughter of king Creon (not the Theban Creon; the name means 'ruler').
- Creon, in anticipation of Medea's wrath, arrives and reveals his plans to send her into exile. Medea pleads for one day's delay and eventually Creon acquiesces.



Jason bringing Pelias the Golden Fleece; a winged victory prepares to crown him with a wreath. Side A from an Apulian red-figure calyx crater, 340–330 BCE.

Medea

- In the next scene Jason arrives to explain his rationale for his apparent betrayal. He explains that he could not pass up the opportunity to marry a royal princess, as Medea is only a barbarian woman, but hopes to join the two families someday and keep Medea as his mistress.
- Medea and the chorus of Corinthian women do not believe him. She reminds him that she left her own people for him ("I rescued you [...] I betrayed both my father and my house [...] now where should I go?"), and that she saved him and slew the dragon. Jason promises to support her after his new marriage ("If you wish me to give you or the children extra money for your trip into exile, tell me; I'm ready to give it with a lavish hand"), but Medea spurns him: "Go on, play the bridegroom! Perhaps [...] you've made a match you'll one day have cause to lament."



Medea kills her son, Campanian red-figure amphora, c. 330 BCE, Louvre (K 300).

Medea

- Medea then returns to plotting the murders of Glauce and Creon. She decides to poison some golden robes (a family heirloom and gift from the sun god Helios, her grandfather) and a coronet in hopes that the bride will not be able to resist wearing them and consequently be poisoned.
- Medea resolves to kill her own children as well, not because the children have done anything wrong, but because she feels it is the best way to hurt Jason.
- She calls for Jason once more and, in an elaborate ruse, apologizes to him for overreacting to his decision to marry Glauce. When Jason appears fully convinced that she regrets her actions, Medea begins to cry in mourning for her exile. She convinces Jason to allow their two sons to give gifts to Glauce in hopes that Creon will lift the exile against the children. Eventually, Jason agrees.



Medea kills her son, Campanian red-figure amphora, c. 330 BCE, Louvre (K 300).

Medea

- In the next scene a messenger recounts Glauce and Creon's deaths. When the children arrived with the robes and coronet, Glauce gleefully put them on and went to find her father. The poison overtook her and she fell to the floor, dying horribly and painfully. Creon clutched her tightly as he tried to save her and, by coming in contact with the robes and coronet, was poisoned and died as well.
- While Medea is pleased with her current success, she decides to take it one step further. Since Jason brought shame upon her for trying to start a new family, Medea resolves to destroy the family he was willing to give up by killing their sons. Medea does have a moment of hesitation when she considers the pain that her children's deaths will put her through. However, she steels her resolve to cause Jason the most pain possible and rushes offstage with a knife to kill her children.



Medea kills her son, Campanian red-figure amphora, c. 330 BCE, Louvre (K 300).

Medea

- Determined to stop Medea, the chorus runs after her only to hear the children scream. Jason then rushes onto the scene to confront Medea about murdering Creon and Glauce, and he quickly discovers that his children have been killed as well. Medea then appears above the stage with the bodies of her children in a chariot given to her by the sun god Helius
- When this play was put on, this scene was accomplished using the *mechane* device, usually reserved for the appearance of a god or goddess.



Medea kills her son, Campanian red-figure amphora, c. 330 BCE, Louvre (K 300).